



Youth Violence Prevention Planning Task Force

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Children are our most precious resource. As a community we owe each child a safe, nurturing environment where they can grow and realize their full potential.

Sadly, as a community we are falling far short of that obligation. Too many of our young people are having their lives shattered by violence. Even one life lost is one too many. But violence has become so commonplace that it doesn't even generate headlines any more. It is accepted as a fact of life.

My own family suffered the devastation and heartbreak of youth violence in 1991 when my 14-year-old brother was shot and killed because he was not quick enough to turn over his jacket. Eighteen years later the pain of that loss has not gone away.

Tragically, hundreds of other Detroit families have suffered the same sorrow and loss in the intervening years. Youth violence is at an epidemic level in our community.

We must act now to identify and implement programs to end youth violence in our community.

That is why one of my first priorities as a member of the Detroit City Council would be to convene a task force on youth violence to develop and implement a comprehensive program to end youth violence in Detroit. I realize this is an ambitious goal with many obstacles. But I also believe that we, as a community, owe this to our young people.

Reducing the violence in our community will not be easy. If it were easy, it would have been done by now. It will require a comprehensive set of programs that address the underlying causes and risk factors for violence, and it will require a long-term commitment at every level.

Violence prevention must be addressed in the same way that many other public health issues are addressed. The campaign to reduce lung cancer does not focus on treatment alone. The campaign has been effective because it focuses on prevention. It educates people on the dangers of smoking and works to change attitudes and behavior. The goal is to get those who smoke to quit and make it unpopular for those who don't smoke to start. Violence prevention has to be approached in the same manner.

We need to reorder our priorities. For example, for each dollar spent on afterschool programs approximately three dollars is spent on the Wayne County Juvenile Facility. We have to spend the dollars up front to reduce the likelihood of incarceration on the back end. Kids who participate in afterschool programs are more likely to graduate high school and attend college; less likely to experiment with drugs, less likely to experiment with sex and less likely to become a teen parent.

Those invited to participate in the task force would include the City of Detroit, Detroit Public Schools, Detroit Federation of Teachers, as well as other labor unions, the business community, the faith-based community, nonprofits, the Detroit Police Department, the Wayne County Sheriff's Office and community groups who are focused on youth.

The task force would conduct its own research and develop its own set of programs. As a start, I would give them a task list that would include the following:

1. **School-based Initiatives:** Programs in schools can be very effective because that is where the kids spend a good part of their day. Schools serve as an anchor in most communities. They are easily accessible to everyone in the neighborhood and they have the space needed to conduct academic and recreational activities. These initiatives could include:
 - Teaching conflict resolution skills to prevent violent outcomes.
 - Creating mentoring programs that include character building activities.
 - Creating programs that work with parents.
 - Academic Assistance Programs.
 - Reaching out to local colleges to recruit students in social work and education to staff the programs as part of their internships for credit.
2. **Faith-based Initiatives:** According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 83 percent of the population claims a religious affiliation. The faith-based community has always been a key part of the fabric of the community here in Detroit. Therefore, the faith-based community can be very effective in getting the message out. These initiatives could include:
 - Working with youth ministries to target at-risk youth. Many churches have the resources to create "street-outreach" programs that go where children are, instead of waiting for the children to come to them.
 - Partnering with other churches to create afterschool programs with similar curriculums to the school-based programs.
 - Creating "safe-house" programs in churches, where children who feel they're in danger can go to get help immediately.
3. **Detroit Police Department:** When Benny Napoleon became the Chief of Police in 1998 more than 200 children age 16 and under were being shot annually and more than 20 died each year. Under his leadership shootings in this age group went down over 75 percent -- from over 200 per year to less than 50 per year. The number of children age 16 and under who died went from over 20 per year down to 3 in 2001. This is clear evidence that youth violence can be prevented if we make it a priority. Police initiatives could include:

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- City Council partnering with the Mayor and Police Department to make sure the department is appropriately funded and resources are utilized effectively.
 - Assuring that the gang squad has appropriate resources to target gang violence in high risk areas, as well as schools.
 - Offering training through community policing programs for neighborhood watch programs and block clubs to teach residents crime prevention strategies.
 - Increasing police presence by placing mini-stations in schools, recreation centers and other community organizations to help reduce crime and make the police more accessible to the citizens. The increased presence also creates an atmosphere where crime is not tolerated.
 - Last, but not least, gun buy-back programs to help reduce the number of guns on the streets.
4. **Business Community:** The business community can be an invaluable resource for our community as it relates to reducing youth violence by providing resources and opportunities for our young people. The task force could:
- Ask businesses to adopt recreation centers/after-school programs to help provide some of the financial assistance needed for the programs to be viable.
 - Ask that businesses provide mentors for young people.
 - Ask that businesses provide subject matter experts for academic assistance programs.
 - Ask businesses to cooperate with the Detroit Public Schools to participate in high-school co-op programs that would provide on the job training opportunities for juniors and seniors to work in their offices.
5. **Labor Community:** The labor community can also be an invaluable resource in our efforts to reduce youth violence by providing opportunities. The task force could:
- Ask labor unions to adopt recreation centers/after-school programs to help provide financial assistance needed for the programs to be viable.
 - Ask labor unions to provide mentors for young people.
 - Ask labor unions to provide subject matter experts for the academic assistance programs.
 - Ask labor unions to provide apprenticeship programs for high school juniors and seniors to learn skilled trades.
6. **Political leaders** can assist in all of the above by making violence prevention a public policy priority. They can provide funding and leverage their influence to spread the message through grassroots and media campaigns. Keeping our children safe should not be just a campaign catchphrase; it must be a major priority for all who have the power to make a difference. **I am extending an invitation for all candidates to sign a pledge to make youth violence a priority.**
7. **Nonprofits and community groups.** One example of nonprofit and community initiatives underway in other communities is CeaseFire, an initiative of the Chicago Project for Violence

Prevention. CeaseFire works with community-based organizations and focuses on street-level outreach, conflict mediation and the changing of community norms to reduce violence, particularly shootings.

Detroit, we have to take a stand. Losing one more child to violence is one child too many. On our own, none of us have all the answers. Together, we can make a powerful force for change. It is time for the entire city to come together and send the message that we care about the safety of our children and that we are determined to secure their future and the future of this city by doing everything in our control to stop the senseless violence.