At Two Meetings in November, Working Group Outlines the Importance of Strong Local Leadership to a Successful Anti-Violence Strategy, and What States and the Federal Government Should Do to Provide Support

At its ninth and tenth meetings, the Violent Crime Working Group discussed how policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels can best organize, deliver, and support strategies to combat violent crime. In previous sessions, the Group identified core values for violent crime reduction, explored recent crime trends in context, highlighted the importance of problem assessment in correctly diagnosing violent crime challenges, discussed leading community-based and law enforcement interventions, and examined the impacts of victimization and trauma. In its final two meetings, the Group explored how best to integrate what was learned in previous sessions into a single cohesive strategy at the local level, and how state and federal policymakers can provide support to local anti-violence efforts.

At its ninth meeting on November 17, the Group heard from Guillermo Cespedes, Chief of Violence Prevention for the City of Oakland and former Deputy Mayor and Director of the Gang Reduction and Youth Development Initiative in Los Angeles, and Susan Lee, Chief of Strategy and Policy for Chicago CRED and former Deputy Mayor for Public Safety for the City of Chicago. At its tenth meeting on December 1, the Group met with Theron Pride, Deputy Associate Attorney General at the U.S. Department of Justice, Phelan Wyrick, Senior Advisor to the Office of Justice Programs at the U.S. Department of Justice, and Mike McLively, Policy Director for the Community Violence Initiative at the Giffords Law Center.

Local Leadership

What We Know

- **Most cities lack a coherent anti-violence vision.** In many cities, certain anti-violence interventions may succeed in isolation, yet rates of violence citywide remain stubbornly high. Why? Few interventions are strong enough to reduce violence across

an entire city on their own, so cities must leverage multiple strategies, operating at the same time, to accumulate larger effects. Many cities struggle to articulate a coherent anti-violence vision that can mobilize a multi-sector response in support of a common goal: substantially reduced violence.

- **Few cities have clear and consistent leadership concerning violence.** Articulating and then translating a city's anti-violence vision into action requires clear and consistent leadership. Roles must be defined, goals must be set, and schedules must be kept. Leaders must agree on a conceptual framework of how to work together, as well as a management system to drive results. Few cities have sustained such leadership over time. Putting a vision into action also requires resources: staff, funding, training, equipment, and so on. Few cities have consistently devoted sufficient resources to anti-violence efforts outside of law enforcement.
    - Mayors (and/or city managers in smaller jurisdictions) are best situated to lead citywide anti-violence efforts. According to the OVP Network, there are at least 34 cities with units specifically dedicated to violence reduction, but not all report directly to the mayor. A few of these units, such as Los Angeles' Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) and New York City's Office to Prevent Gun Violence, are well-resourced, but many are not.

- **Create a shared vision of both the problem and solution.** As described in previous Working Group bulletins, a city's anti-violence vision should be shaped by a clear understanding of its violence problem. It should also be informed by sound research and evidence on what actually works to reduce violence. Finally, the vision must be inclusive, reflecting the needs of impacted individuals and communities. Ultimately, this vision should produce a concrete theory of change that describes how a city will actually achieve positive results.
    - Serious violence concentrates among small groups of people and places, so a city's theory of change must include direct engagement with these individuals and locations. This engagement should include a blend of community-based and law enforcement strategies. It is not enough for cops and communities to both be involved – there must be actual communication and collaboration between them.
- **Establish "infrastructure" to implement the vision.** Every city suffering from high rates of violent crime should have a permanent unit dedicated to violence reduction operating inside the mayor's office, with senior leadership reporting directly to the mayor. Housing the unit anywhere else or placing intermediaries between the mayor and the unit's leadership will significantly diminish performance. Violence reduction

units can administer funding as well as provide direct services; in Los Angeles, the GRYD office does both. This unit must be substantially and sustainably staffed and funded.

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- **Establish trust by listening, showing up, and delivering.** "License to operate" is a term used to describe those with authority and credibility in the violence reduction field. Trust can be established by taking care to listen to impacted community members and those who authentically represent them. It can also be established by being present at critically important moments and assisting those in need. For instance, in Los Angeles, GRYD staff earned trust by responding to every homicide crime scene in GRYD areas and providing support and services to friends and relatives of victims, as well as community members.

State and Federal Support

What We Know

- **Reducing violence is primarily a local responsibility, but states and the federal government can play a strong supporting role.** Most efforts to counter violence occur in cities, where local agencies and organizations engage directly with those involved in violent crime. States and the federal government can make important indirect contributions through grantmaking, regulation and legislation, messaging and convening, and through the direct actions of certain state and federal agencies.
- **State and federal support for local anti-violence efforts has increased substantially, but clear guidance is lacking.** According to the Giffords Law Center, only five states directly invested in local anti-violence efforts in 2017, for a combined total of $60 million. In 2021, 15 committed to do so, for a combined total of at least $690 million. The federal government has increased its investment as well, potentially including as much as $5 billion in funding for community violence intervention

strategies in the Build Back Better Act pending before Congress.

While new funding is being made available, localities lack clear guidance on how best to use these funds in order to maximize impact. In Massachusetts and New York, both states require localities to focus on high-risk individuals and locations. In addition, they bring together funded localities to share lessons learned and learn best practices. Most states, and the federal government, do not provide enough concrete direction to localities to ensure local strategies are consistent with the best evidence on violence reduction.

What To Do

- **States and the federal government should support evidence-informed local strategies, while also supporting innovation.** Most state and federal taxpayer dollars invested in anti-violence strategies should be spent on initiatives that are informed by rigorous research and evidence. The Working Group identified a number of these strategies in previous bulletins. At the same time, resources must be made available for localities to pursue or enhance "promising" or "emerging" strategies and to experiment with new approaches for effectively reducing violence.
- **States and the federal government should fund inclusively, creating opportunities for smaller organizations to become grantees and building capacity through training and technical assistance.** Sound grant management is essential, but many smaller organizations struggle to meet state and especially federal grant requirements. New funding arrangements should be made to ensure all grant applicants have an opportunity to participate. These include mini-grants, intermediary or pass-through arrangements, and fiscal sponsorship, among other strategies. The Latino Coalition for Community Leadership is one positive example of such efforts.

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In previous bulletins, the Working Group has encouraged local policymakers and practitioners to seek assistance from experts in the field. States and the federal government should

expand such efforts by funding an increased array of training and technical assistance to advance implementation of evidence-informed strategies. For instance, organizations like the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform can help localities develop the anti-violence visions and plans discussed in this bulletin.

- **States and the federal government should provide opportunities for localities to learn from one another.** Peer-to-peer learning is an important means of sharing best practices about what works in violence reduction. States and the federal government should encourage such learning through convenings like those in Massachusetts and New York, and via the establishment of information-sharing networks such as the Community Violence Collaborative.
- **States and the federal government should expand investments in data and research relevant to violent crime reduction.** Many local efforts to reduce violence are stymied by a lack of available, reliable, and shareable data. Similarly, many important research questions relevant to local violence reduction remain unanswered. With local resources devoted to addressing immediate needs, states and the federal government should make long-term investments in improving the quality and quantity of both data and research, which ultimately will accelerate progress at the local level.

Where To Go

- For more information on local offices dedicated to violence prevention, contact the National OVP Network.
- For more information on state and federal approaches for organizing, delivering, and supporting anti-violence strategies:
    - America at a Crossroads: Reimagining Federal Funding to End Community Violence (Giffords Law Center)
    - Federal Investment in Community-Driven Public Safety (Urban Institute)
    - Investing in Intervention: The Critical Role of State-Level Support in Breaking the Cycle of Urban Gun Violence (Giffords Law Center)
    - Memorandum: Comprehensive Strategy for Reducing Violent Crime (U.S. Department of Justice)
    - Presentation: State Support for CVI – Trends and Best Practices (Mike McLively,

Giffords Law Center)

  - Statements and releases concerning gun violence on April 7th, April 7th (additional statement), and June 23rd, 2021 (The White House)

- For federal funds to support the initiatives described in this bulletin, policymakers should begin with the State and Local Recovery Funds in the American Rescue Plan. In its administrative guidance, the U.S. Department of the Treasury is clear that state and local governments "may use payments from the Fiscal Recovery Funds to engage in planning and analysis in order to improve programs addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, including through use of targeted consumer outreach, improvements to data or technology infrastructure, impact and data analysis."

- More generally, policymakers should make a practice of monitoring relevant funding opportunities from federal grant-making agencies. The best way to track funding solicitations across the federal government is to create an account at grants.gov and search for funding opportunities by key words and federal agencies.

- At the state and local level, policymakers should focus on the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program. One of JAG's eight mandated purposes is to support state and local "planning, evaluation, and technology improvement programs," and many states and local governments have used these funds specifically to support coordination and planning initiatives. To learn more about federal funds administered by state and local governmental agencies, identify your State Administrative Agency (SAA) and learn about the policies and procedures that govern their grant making.

- Finally, while not a source of direct financial support, policymakers should familiarize themselves with their state's Statistical Analysis Center (SACs). Generally housed within their states' SAA, SACs "perform a variety of activities including collecting, analyzing, and distributing criminal justice data, conducting policy-relevant research, and designing and implementing automated information systems." Dedicated to assisting state and local policymakers promote evidence-based practices and improving the administration of criminal and juvenile justice systems, SAC researchers and policy analysts are often an untapped resource of technical support for collaboration, data analysis, and strategic planning.