

Minutes
**ANC 6A Community Outreach Committee (COC) of
Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 6A
Regular Meeting - December 13 2021
Virtual Meeting via Zoom**

Meeting called to order at 7:02 pm.

Quorum present.

COC members present: Roni Hollmon (Chair), Stephanie Thangavelu, Gladys Mack, Sarah Bell and Marc Friend

COC members absent: Jason Gresh

Commissioners present: Amber Gove, Mike Soderman

Panelists: Ward 6 Councilmember Charles Allen; Laura Marks, Chief of Staff, Ward 6 Councilmember; AUSA Magdalena Acevedo (5th); Christopher Wade, Community Outreach Specialist (1st and also covering 5th), Captain Tatjana Savoy, MPD 1D; Pranav Namda, Moms Demand Action; Ms. Thompson El, Co Chief, Cure The Streets; Naiké Savain, DC Justice Lab; Gary Zottoli, Defund MPD/Metro DSA

Community members present: Nicholas, Anonymous 1, Ijanezicki, Brainic, AAG Lauren Haggerty, Airet, Micheala F, Amy Daniels (USAID/Brazil) Carolyn's IPAD, Colleen Moss, Chris Laskowski, Kate Mitchell, Ameen, Kris Garrity, Amailia D, Lisa G, Roxanne Garris, Maureen Benitz, Sam Deluca

Councilman Allen gave an update on public safety. There is no one piece of legislation or budget to address the spectrum of issues involved in public safety. There are immediate interventions to be used when a neighborhood is experiencing violence. But there should also be focus on long-term issues. Most importantly, the global "we" needs to ask "why": Why did someone choose to have a gun in their hand in the first place? Why did the trauma exist? Why did the conflict exist that led to the harm and violence being done? If those questions are not asked, we stay on the same merry go round and continue to perpetuate a lot of the harm that takes place. In the last 2 years there has been an increase in gun violence, not just in DC, but around the region and the country. There is dialogue between the Chief of Police, violence prevention leadership, the Attorney General and the US Attorney's office which includes much discussion about statistics and metrics which are important factors; if you or a neighbor are the victim of a crime, it does not matter the statistics are. One area to be examined is a category called instant conflict. For example, two guys were playing flag football, jawing back and forth, and then it escalated and a gun is involved. Why could that situation not be deescalated before it got to that point? We have all the tools in the world once the trigger gets pulled to come in and intervene after the fact; in what ways are we trying to get ahead of things with early intervention? This area is where Mr. Allen believes the work is right now and where he would like to put resources. DC has had record investments in its violence prevention work, both through the Office of Neighborhood Safety Engagement and the Attorney General's Cure The Streets program.

Committee Member Marc Friend requested to hear more about youth legislation that has been introduced, especially since the Committee is looking at root causes and identifying how to support youth for whom this is their first crime and how can we really support them to set up

for a better future.

Mr. Allen responded that there is pending and recent legislation. Areas under examination include: How do you ensure that, when a young person encounters law enforcement or the criminal justice system, that encounter is age appropriate and that the youth understands what is going on. We know that, for young people in particular, restorative justice models have a huge impact. The DC Attorney General's office is focused on this approach. Being able to use restorative justice, which brings the victim and the one who did the harm together to say what do justice and accountability look like. In many cases they can work together to find what justice and accountability mean. Using this process, we can look at the metrics afterwards and determine if this approach had an impact. In most of our restorative justice efforts, you can see a really successful program where young people do not go back and reoffend because that young person understands what harm was caused. For those not familiar with the DC criminal justice system, the DC elected Attorney General is the one who, for the most part, prosecutes children. The US Attorney's office, which is Federal, prosecutes most adults. Most cases are prosecuted in either DC Superior Court or District Court, both of which are Federal. DC local laws get prosecuted in Superior Court by federally appointed judges. After conviction, a DC resident gets put out into the Federal Bureau of Prisons and gets sent out across the country, disconnected from community and family; that creates another problem for reentry. Mr. Allen believes that the District as a government need to take back control of its system, but it will not happen overnight. One other program he addressed was the Youth Rehabilitation Act. If you have a process where a judge is asked to have a crystal ball on the front end to predict which youth shows promise (called a set aside), you are not going to get it right all the time. So DC completely changed that system to have the judge make the set aside on the back end, which creates a much stronger incentive for a young person to do rehabilitation and restorative justice work. What has been found, using data and evidence, is when a young person uses this method and is successful, they are likely not to ever reoffend. That allows that person to open the door to jobs and education.

Chair Roni Hollmon asked whether DC is really a sanctuary city if undocumented children who come into contact with the justice system are then picked up by ICE. Ms. Naike Savain of Dc Justice Lab gave the background on the issue. Councilman Allen said that the incident occurred because of a data breach and that the issue has now been resolved. He has worked with a coalition to determine how to stop ICE from getting into databases and DC jail. The Council has looked at legislation to ensure young people's information is not shared with other law enforcement agencies and are protected. Ms. Savain stated that there was legislation that was added to restrict when officers can come on school property to arrest young people.

Commissioner Amber Gove asked Mr. Allen what follow up or changes he or the Council are considering around the rise in traffic and getting the drivers that persist in speeding and endangering our community.

Mr. Allen answered that his daughter is in 4th grade and there is only one crosswalk between home and her school and while he trusts his daughter, he does not trust drivers. She has asked many times to walk to school by herself and he just cannot allow it. In that same crosswalk with his 5 year old, a car whipped around because they did not want to wait and had to come to a screeching halt after almost crushing us. DDOT has to design intersections, crosswalks, raised crosswalks, speed humps, speed tables, other tools to slow traffic and design them in a way that you cannot get up to fast. And then we need a system that has

accountability. Mr. Allen sits on the Transportation Planning Board which includes elected officials from the District, Maryland and Virginia. DC has no tools or mechanisms to make Maryland or Virginia residents accountable for reckless driving and speeding in the District. It has been difficult to get consensus from Maryland and Virginia to have some type of reciprocity. Even DC has not made that a priority. The Council passed the Vision Zero law and are trying to get the Mayor to implement the whole thing. The Council is looking at further legislation

Commissioner Soderman stated that he believes that we do need to look at traffic calming from an engineering aspect and modifications that we can get into our streets, that reciprocity with our neighboring states is needed and that we need to have more enforcement. When you have people who are endangering us and know they are not going to get pulled over and they're not going to get a ticket for breaking the law, they are just going to keep doing it. All members of his four-person family have had near death experiences while either walking or biking in our community. He believes we need a multi prong approach and fair and equitable enforcement of our traffic laws.

Councilman Allen said he agreed but one of the questions the city has is who should write the citation. There are lots of studies and data collected that talk about the ways in which traffic stops are going to be disproportionate and inequitable. How do we want to see that stop made?

Chair Hollmon read the following question from the Q and A as follows: How is the community being educated on the causes of violence, and the psychodynamics of these issues, i.e., the social political necessity of black criminality, poverty and crime, wealth and crime?

Mr. Allen responded that it is a huge question and he thinks conversations like these are a part of the way that happens. There may be some diversity of perspective on this panel but every single person on this panel wants to see a safe city. How we define justice, how we define accountability. He believes that public safety and justice are yoked together. We know we have a criminal justice system that disproportionately impacts our black neighbors and low income communities. These are not always comfortable conversations. The ANC and all of its constituents have significant roles to play. There is a police reform commission, for example, which laid out a wealth of recommendations around what that can look .

Gary Zottoli with the Defund MPD Coalition, which is a black led organization with 29 member organizations stated that over the last year, aside from the protests, the organization has been doing canvassing operations. They have been going door to door in Wards 4 and 5. The plan is to inform residents about what the Defund MPD Coalition is trying to do; which is push back against the constant increases to MPD's budget and find a way to reasonably reduce their budget. They are manning tables at public events, fairs, markets and political education events. They are also looking at looking at printing information to be placed in businesses and other community public spaces to inform the community about alternative policing programs, homeless services, behavioral services, domestic violence services, etc.

Naiké Savain, counsel for DC Justice Lab, which is a black-led policy advocacy organization, hopes to try to create community-driven data-supported evidence and racially just policies in DC. This is a major challenge. There is a powerful, deeply entrenched narrative that violations of the law must be met with punishment, prosecution, police and armed enforcement. There is less understanding or a collective sort of acknowledgement that

policing is violence, state sponsored violence, that the community is okay with because it is violence done on our behalf. It is very difficult to get people to engage in this conversation about the socio-political necessity of black criminality. MPD is in control of all of its data. In September 2021, they released data for the last five years and there were over 60 violations of the law including among MPD officers. Those violations did not necessarily result in arrest or prosecution; the vast majority resulted in suspension and those officers are still on the street. Part of the challenge is unlearning the idea that “criminals” are just inherently bad rather than someone who made a mistake or made a bad decision at some point. She thanked Councilmember Allen for talking about investment, about root causes and for asking those questions. The community is not educated about what leads to people violating the law and what that actually means. People need to acknowledge that we are trading long term success for short term visible decision making. More police on the street is short term but it does not necessarily change our long term safety.

Christopher Wade, Community Outreach Specialist for the US Attorney’s Office, responded that it was a great question. The question reminded him of what he heard from a youth recently, that he felt 30% safe. The question is why. The US Attorney’s Office offers a program in schools called Youth Corps, which introduces 5th and 6th graders on the criminal justice system, the roles of the judge, the jury, the lawyers; the concept behind the program is to teach them conflict resolution. The US Attorney’s Office also provides a presentation on knowing your rights for returning citizens, who have had contact or experiences with law enforcement. It was discovered that the Office needed a youth program as well. Part of that program was a youth focus group to determine what they needed, Mr. Wade encouraged the focus group members to get to know the police, the community, to attend meetings like this and how to report if you have an encounter that you feel is inappropriate. Finally, the US Attorney’s Office has a Community Violence working group made up of community partners.

Pranav Namda of Moms Demand Action stated that he appreciated hearing these perspectives. What is driving the narrative that crime is surging and what is the impact of spreading this message that is used to push for more policing, more incarceration, more prosecution and the impact of those harmful and violent mechanisms. The idea that to fight violence we use systems of violence needs to be challenged.

Chair Hollmon read a question in Chat: Does Councilmember Allen believe policing is violence?

Councilmember Allen responded that it was not as black and white as that and gave two examples. While walking home with his daughter, he encountered a First District MPD officer standing at the intersection talking to people, that is not violence. Then he talked about Antwan Gilmore, who was sleeping in his car, was surrounded, then awoken, was startled, drove away, shot at and killed. That is violence. He also addressed an additional Chat question: Does he believe every crime has to be prosecuted? He gave an example of restorative justice. A child had stolen an iPad, the victim said she did not want the child prosecuted but wanted him to learn carpentry with her husband instead. Part of the distinction that is part of that hard conversation is interactions with the police are different for someone who looks like me versus Mr. Gilmore who was black.

Commissioner Soderman said that one thing that can be agreed on is the housing issue for all needs to be squared away in the city. There need to be the proper support services (mental health, substance abuse, financial) available. He asked how many vocational schools are left in the city? He offered examples of vocations that do not have any schools offering these

trades, which can train those who are not college bound to be able to make a living wage so that they can live within our community and raise their families. He stated that the community needs to have reasonable and fair enforcement of the law because someone “does not look like me” should not be a factor as far as our encounters with law enforcement goes. We also need to have an adequate police force as long as all the other things.

AUSA Magdalena Acevedo stated that this has been a great conversation. She wanted the community to know that AUSA is not a part of the MPD. As mentioned by Mr. Wade, the US Attorney’s office has a number of justice initiatives, working on justice, working on whether everyone who does have a criminal case is treated fairly or whether that criminal case continues moving forward. There are several courts where the goal is not conviction but to provide services. They have an East of the River court, mental health court and there are large graduations when people receive the services that they need and are stabilized back into the community. There are times they receive files from the police and do not prosecute. They look to see not only if a crime was committed, but whether it would serve justice to continue and whether the person’s rights were violated in any way during the arrest. Since MPD and some other agencies use body-worn cameras, they can just review the film and decide if it’s something we want to support. If it is something that we can use as a teachable moment with MPD, we do that instead. She then gave an update on the January 6 prosecutions. As of the date of this meeting, they had charged 710 people in 46 states. In addition, they have done trainings on human trafficking, domestic violence, to child sex exploitation.

Mr. Wade shared that he is now able to conduct virtual classes with young men in the juvenile detention center. The purpose of the program is that when they are released, they do not go back to what they were doing. The program offers mock interviews to help with workplace development based on what their interests are and identifies what they want to do, what the barriers are and how we can overcome those barriers. He is looking forward to coordinating with Commissioner Soderman.

Commissioner Soderman stated that many people coming back to the community cannot get a job; if a person does the time, it should not count against them forever. How can that be fixed?

Councilmember Allen responded that it is a really hard question. The term collateral consequences is used to describe this. For many of the jobs people cited tonight you need a license. Previously, DC licenses could be denied for moral turpitude. DC changed the law last year which should open up pathways and have a meaningful impact.

Lashonia Thompson-El of Cure The Streets thanked everyone who had spoken. She supported the model of restorative justice. Ms. Thompson-El gave an overview of Cure The Streets, which has 6 sites in the city and requested that she be invited back to the Committee to make a presentation about her women’s reentry group, Through The Wire, at some future date.

Chair Hollmon read a Q&A question from Sam Deluca which reads as follows: When I attend events like this, I always hear everyone involved talk about the importance of restorative justice, the importance of breaking the cycle of violence, the limits of the police and preventing crime rather than reacting, etc. However the funding for non-police programs, everyone always says it supports, is a tiny drop in a bucket, there’s a disconnect here. How do you attend to address this and find reality in line with the rhetoric?

Lashonia Thompson-El said that she wanted to say that the funding for Cure The Streets was increased and once expansion is complete, they will have a total of 10 sites with 5 in Ward 8.

Councilman Allen stated that he has put a million dollars into the DC budget into the restorative justice programs at the US Attorney's Office, put millions more in to expand the Leadership Academy with the neighborhood safety engagement office and expanded the pathways cohorts for the young men and women who come into that program. But it is a fight for every budget.

Chair Hollmon read a Chat question as follows: To what extent, if at all, does the AUSA consult the victims or families before deciding not to prosecute?

AUSA Acevedo responded they very much so attempted to contact all the victims or family in cases of violence, from simple assault up to homicide. Every other week, one of her duties is to contact victims of domestic violence from the day before. AUSA spends many hours speaking to the victims, not just about whether to prosecute or not, but what other services we can provide them to make them feel safer, to cover funeral costs, to connect them to other neighborhood associations.

Pranav Namda wanted to raise the point that a lot of time people coming out of jail are in the same state and that is important to recognize that many people come out worse. It is the trauma of being incarcerated especially for young people. He does not think any child is being served behind bars.

Gary Zottoli shared some of his life story and said that investment needs to be made in a city that looks out for each other that makes sure people have the things they need to remove the incentives that cause them to commit crime. Effort needs to be made to ensure people can afford to live in DC.

Naïké Savain shared some of the Chat conversations that had centered around police overtime and also said there are several pieces of legislation that would be helpful to move forward including the Restore Act.

Mr. Friend recommended ANC 6A approve a resolution in support of the Restore Act. Chair Hollmon seconded. Motion passed 6-0-1.

Mr. Friend recommended ANC 6A approve a resolution to increase the funding of Cure the Streets, the DC Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE) and violence interrupters at large. Commissioner Soderman seconded. Motion passed 7-0-0.

Meeting adjourned 9:07 pm