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## CITY OF ALBANY GUN VIOLENCE TASK FORCE

### Interim Report to the Common Council

April 21, 2008

#### I. Mission Statement

The mission of the Albany Gun Violence Task Force is twofold: assessment and recommendation.

To the end of assessment, it is our purpose:

1. To ascertain the root causes of gun violence;
2. To examine the manifestations of gun violence; and
3. To engage in dialogue with the people concerning gun violence.

To the end of recommendation, it is our purpose:

1. To identify resources to address gun violence;
2. To suggest a strategy to alleviate gun violence; and
3. To recommend programs to combat gun violence.

It is our intention to develop a working partnership inclusive of the Task Force, city agencies, existing programs, and the citizens of Albany to fulfill the purposes identified.

## II. Structure

Reverend Dr. Edward B. Smart was appointed Vice Chair of the Task Force.

The Task Force formed three Committees: Data, Prevention, and Community Action a/k/a "Street". These self-directed bodies have identified and defined their purpose, scope and activities. Each Committee has reported out as indicated in Section IV below.

The Common Council provided the Task Force with an Intern, Tehra Coles, a student at Albany Law School, to:

- Attend meetings, take and provide minutes;
- Undertake research as directed by the Task Force;
- Assist in writing Task Force reports;
- Supervise volunteer community members; and
- Other such tasks as assigned.

## III. Meetings

The Task Force has conducted ten of twenty-four regular meetings. These meetings are held on the first and third Tuesdays of each month and are open to the public. The Task Force has also conducted one Public Forum, held at Philip Livingston School, on March 25<sup>th</sup>, attended by 85-90 members of the community. The Task Force intends to conduct further Public Forums at different locations around the City.

The Task Force prepared a list of individuals and groups it intends to meet with over the course of its year-long span, including: Harris Oberlander and Lisa Good (Trinity Institution), representatives from the School District and Teacher's Union, Dr. James Crucetti (Albany County Department of Health), Ron "Cook" Barrett (City of Albany Department of Youth and Workforce Services Gang Prevention Program Coordinator), John Cutro (Restorative Justice), Dr. Mark Gestring (Trauma Surgeon at Strong Memorial Hospital) and a representative from

the All City PTA.

On March 4, the Task Force met with Dr. Mark Gestring, head of the Trauma Unit at Rochester's Strong Memorial Hospital. He has created a program aimed at stopping repeat gun violence by mobilizing resources in the emergency room after a penetrative injury (gun shot or knife wound). The program began with the founders making the following key assumptions: (1) no child should ever be shot or stabbed, (2) the injury was probably due to some sort of high-risk activity, (3) Children under the age of 18 typically have someone answerable for their behavior (parent or guardian), (4) Youth who have been shot or stabbed once are more likely to be shot or stabbed again. The program has no funding of its own, but relies on several individual agencies that are brought to bear after the patient is stabilized in the emergency room. This screening process determines where the patient will go if he or she is released, may recommend a psychiatric exam and admission to the hospital and recommends service providers to be deployed within the 24 hours following the injury.

On March 18, the Task Force met with Lisa Good of Trinity Institution. She identified the need for a "coordinated community response" to be mobilized after a shooting to mitigate further violence. This would consist of individuals who have been trained in recognizing and addressing Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. These resources would be coordinated by a lead organization and available to be deployed immediately after an incident and throughout subsequent days (e.g. funerals, community meetings, etc.).

#### **IV. Committee Reports**

##### **Data Committee**

Hon. Gerard E. Maney  
Dr. Leonard I Morgenbesser  
Dr. Robert E. Worden

The Data Committee is performing three tasks:

- to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data on risk factors for gun violence in Albany, which may serve to focus potential interventions on conditions that contribute to gun violence;
- to collect and analyze information on violent crime and, in particular, firearms-related crime in other municipalities, to better understand Albany in the context of American urban violence; and
- to collect information on demonstrably effective interventions, organized around the risk factors toward which those interventions are directed, and on the existence and capacity of evidence-based programming in Albany.

The performance of the first task will build on the Worden and McLean report, *Violent Crime in Albany*, which includes, in partial satisfaction of the Common Council's mandate in paragraph A of § 42-76, information on the "number and types of gun related offenses ... in the City of Albany from the year 2000 through 2006." Our attention to risk factors for violence will be guided by extant, scientifically validated research on violence, including distillations of research by expert panels convened by the National Research Council.<sup>1</sup> We have conducted some additional analysis of shootings, and particularly the ages of people involved in shooting incidents, and we will explore the prospects for further analysis of police department data, other numerical data, and of qualitative data to better describe the contours of gun violence in Albany, and to reach informed conclusions about risk factors for gun violence in this city. We are also exploring the utility of analyzing media coverage of gun violence, as an influence on and indicator of public perceptions and policy preferences.

The performance of the second task will be based mainly on Uniform Crime Report information on crime in cities whose populations are comparable to that of Albany, and especially cities that are located in northern, industrial states whose economic conditions can be expected to resemble those of Albany. We are identifying cities whose 2000 rates of violent crime were similar to that of Albany in 2000, with attention to the trends in violent crime in

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary see National Research Council, *Understanding and Preventing Violence*, Panel on Understanding and Control of Violent Behavior, Albert J. Reiss, Jr., and Jeffrey A. Roth (eds.) (Washington: National Academy Press, 1993), Table 7-1, p. 297.

2001-2006, and also cities whose 2006 rates of violent crime were similar to that of Albany in 2006, with attention to the trends in violent crime in 2000-2005. We will also use extant information on patterns of gun violence in other cities as a point of comparison with that in Albany.

The performance of the third task includes a review and assessment of evidence on programmatic and other interventions, including prevention, treatment, and enforcement, and a review of current programs and practices in Albany. The Center for the Prevention of Violence, at the University of Colorado, has identified violence prevention programs whose effectiveness has been established through research; “[t]he project, called Blueprints for Violence Prevention, has identified 11 prevention and intervention programs that meet a strict scientific standard of program effectiveness” (<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/index.html>). In addition, the Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has established a model programs guide that “is designed to assist practitioners and communities in implementing evidence-based prevention and intervention programs that can make a difference in the lives of children and communities” ([http://www.dsgonline.com/mpg2.5/mpg\\_index.htm](http://www.dsgonline.com/mpg2.5/mpg_index.htm)). We are also assembling information on promising hospital-based interventions, such as Baltimore’s Violence Intervention Program, about which some evidence on effectiveness has accumulated. We are using these resources to identify programming that may be suitable for adoption in Albany, and we will take stock of current programming to identify gaps that might be filled.

### **Prevention Committee**

Hon. Betty J. Barnette  
Leslie Fisher  
Michael P. McDermott, Esq.  
Rev. John U. Miller  
Robert L. Serenka, Esq.

The Prevention Committee is performing three tasks:

- to define “prevention” within the context of gun violence in Albany and identify causes of such violence;

- to investigate prevention and intervention programs and policies from other municipalities; and
- to draft recommendations consistent with the aim of reducing gun violence in Albany.

With regard to the first task, the Committee has constructed a working model of the causes of gun violence in Albany, which can be separated into root and immediate causes:

1) Root causes: lack of education, poverty, feelings of hopelessness, non-supportive or negative home environment, and poor self-image or identity.

2) Immediate causes: triggers for gun violence include disputes over drugs, turf, and women, for perceived slights over respect (the lack thereof), and for revenge/retaliation for prior violence.

With regard to the second task, the Committee has met with Hon. Michael Green, District Attorney of Monroe County, and Dr. John Klofas, Professor of Criminal Justice at Rochester Institute of Technology, to discuss the programs and experience of efforts to reduce gun violence in Rochester and Monroe County. These programs are generally focused on making carry and use of a handgun a costly proposition by developing strategies to reduce the number of guns proximate to crimes. These strategies include maximum sentences for gun crimes, identifying and targeting high risk places and people, “call-ins” with chronic offenders, their families, support groups and associates, and programs to replace the role of gangs in youth’s lives.

The Committee also met with Beverly Jackson, from Pathways to Peace in Rochester. The program is run out of the Mayor’s office and receives some funding through local business grants. The program serves people 12-25 years old and provides parenting programs, violence intervention, anger management, and tours of correctional facilities.

With regard to the third task, the Committee is working on recommendations around:

- 1) Leveraging pre-established relationships between members of the community and churches, schools, businesses and community organizations;
- 2) Identifying a responsible entity to take the lead on coordination of existing programs, community organizations and individuals; and
- 3) Identifying gaps in current programs and suggest new or expanded programs.

**COMMUNITY ACTION COMMITTEE a/k/a "Street Committee"**

Allison Banks  
Rev. Valerie Faust  
Rev. Dr. Edward B Smart  
Hon. P. David Soares  
Chief James W Tuffey

I. **Statement of Purpose:** Our task is to direct individual and small group conversations with people in the community to hear their concerns, ideas, and experiences with crime and gun violence. We plan to gather this information via meetings at schools with children in elementary, middle and high school settings; door to door conversations in different areas of the city (as Chief Tuffey directs); speaking with children in other settings such as after school programs, juvenile environments, etc; and speaking with clergy at various churches and/or clergy associations/fellowships.

II. **Activity to Date:** a) There was a meeting attended by several committee members with Ron "Cook" Barrett at the Saturday night youth gathering he directs at the "Y" which was arranged by Chief Tuffey. Rev. Smart and Dr. Morgenbesser met with 200 young people and discussed the topic of gun violence among other things. The meeting was successful. b) Contact was made on several occasions with the Albany Board of Education requesting permission to hold small group meetings at several schools. An effort is still

being made to bring it to fruition because there is still no reply from Linda Jackson-Chalmers who is the contact person. A letter is going to be drafted and sent out in an effort to speed the process. c) Rev. Faust is in contact with a female gang member who is considered the mother of a group of Bloods. She is considered a hardened, tough "OG" which stands for "original gangster" who is highly respected in the family and wants to do something to help stop the violence. Rev. Faust is gathering information that will be helpful in the fight against juvenile crime and gun violence.

III. **Planned Activities:** Meetings on dates to be set at the above-mentioned venues to discuss gun violence. The following events will occur during National Crime Victims Week: April 14<sup>th</sup> at 9 AM is an open invitation to meet at the LOB to speak out; April 16<sup>th</sup> 12 Noon to 2 PM is a "Lie In" at the Capital steps in memory of all those lost to violence; April 17<sup>th</sup> is a Ceremony in Academy Park where Mayor Jennings will dedicate new benches in honor of victims; April 19<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 PM is a Brick Ceremony at the Empire State Plaza during which Allison Banks will receive an award for her community work in Albany. These events will be an opportunity for members of the Street/Community Committee to speak with people and record comments made about gun violence. In addition, the Task Force will be meeting with youth at the "Y" on May 10, where we will break into small groups and rotate among the youth. Finally, the Street Committee will be walking the neighborhoods this spring and summer talking to families and youth about their concerns and experiences.