

GUN VIOLENCE TASK FORCE

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, August 19, 2008

4:00 PM

Philip Schuyler Achievement Academy, Albany, NY
676 Clinton Ave.

Task Force Members Present:

Leslie Fisher
Hon. Gerard E. Maney
Michael P. McDermott, Esq.
Dr. Leonard I Morgenbesser
Ms. Denia Van Houter FOR Rev. Dr. Edward B. Smart
Mark Harris, Esq. FOR Hon. P. David Soares
Robert E. Worden
Hon. Betty Barnette
Rev. Valerie Faust

Task Force Members Absent:

Rev. John U. Miller
Ms. Allison Banks
Police Chief James Tuffey
Mr. Robert Serenka, Esq.

Council Members Present:

4th Ward Council Member Barbara Smith (Vice Chair of Council's Public Safety Committee)

Common Council President Hon. Shawn Morris

3rd Ward Council Member Corey Ellis

Members of the Public Present: 16

Minutes from the previous meeting were approved with changes from **Dr. Morgenbesser** and **Mr. Fisher**.

Neither the Prevention committee nor the Street committee met since the last update.

Ms. Smith said that the Task Force needs to get work done on the recommendations outside of the meeting and make an effort to prioritize. We need volunteers to head up this effort.

Dr. Worden said that he and the others that worked on the interim report would be willing to go back and put the final together as well.

Dr. Morgenbesser said that he had the opportunity to look at some gang literature. He also contacted Professor Malcolm Kline from California. Mr. Kline has studied gangs and has said that there is only anecdotal literature about the effectiveness of gang summits.

Mr. Fisher said that he agrees with what **Dr. Morgenbesser** said. There is not a lot known about gang summits and without more details, it's just an idea.

Ms. Van Houter said that **Rev. Smart** would be willing to discuss it in further details later.

NEW BUSINESS

Dr. Morgenbesser distributed a Memo regarding a new concept. The memo included an article about a Schenectady County judge named Karen Drago who announced a policy to DAs and defense attorneys. She stated that she would no longer accept plea agreements that do not require the accused to serve at least 10 years in prison if they have actually discharged a weapon. Dr. Morgenbesser requested that members review the information.

Mr. Harris said that the judge has discretion as to whether to accept a plea bargain. However, the judge is supposed to be neutral and not have preconceived or determined stances on sentencing. The problem with unilateral policies is that they do not take into account exceptions.

Dr. Morgenbesser said that, if the Task Force decides to include this policy as a recommendations, that they could recommend it to the Albany County criminal court judges.

Mr. McDermott said that this seems a little out of character for a judge.

Rev. Joyce Hartwell said that her task force met with Judge Breslin about deterrence and discussed the idea that a lot of the kids that were charged with Rockefeller drug laws had never even heard about it.

Mr. Ellis said that the Rockefeller drug laws were a good example and he is opposed to the policy of Judge Drago. Before recommending this policy the Task Force should investigate whether Judge Drago is running for reelection and really consider whether mandatory sentencing really works. Policies like these will result in the level of young black men and women in jail skyrocketing.

Virginia Ryan, Sage College, said that sometimes doing things simultaneously is important. There are ramifications for certain interventions that may negate some other ones. We should sequence them.

Mr. Fisher emphasized the need for grass roots movements to come forward again.

Ms. Smith if we are going to provide a list of organizations and groups that are available then we need to be more specific and provide a mechanism to let people know what is available.

Adrienne Kisse asked how effective these programs are and whether there is data to back them up.

Dr. Morgenbesser responded that the Task Force has made a conscientious effort to push Albany Med to start some sort of violence prevention program, because there is evidence that it works. We are also working with Project Cease Fire.

Mr. Fisher said that the effectiveness of community programs is a very good issue to address. Curriculum and violence prevention programs work as well.

Ms. Van Houter said that when people keep coming back it is evidence that the program is working.

Ms. Kisse said that there should be some sort of monitoring and evaluation done by the school of public health to determine whether it is effective.

Dr. Morgenbesser said that the Task Force and individual community members needed to keep pushing Albany Med to start the program.

Shawntell Mills, former CPS worker, asked who is talking to the parents. No one is dealing with that. She has seen a lot of kids whose parents were also in gangs.

Mr. Ellis, also Director of Project Trinity, said that the way Trinity knows that they are doing a good job servicing the community is by watching the number of new people that come back. How many more kids do we need to talk to before we can make a recommendations? We need to provide them with direction.

Ms. Smith said that the issue of evaluating voluntary programs, as opposed to paid programs, is difficult. It is about a value system at home as well. If checking for weapons and not permitting them under your roof, and being in bed before midnight are encouraged by parents it will make a difference. There is a piece of legislation introduced yesterday, sponsored by **Councilman Casey**, that, if passed, would change the city code around gangs. It might criminalize non criminal behavior.

John Cutro said that peer culture can be stronger than parental culture. There is a group meeting at Trinity about breaking the silence with regard to the resistance in the community to reporting crime. It will be August 20, 2008 at 5:30.

The Task Force passes around a sheet of paper and everyone writes down the names and contact information for various community groups.

Brother Yusuf, part of the ROOTS program, said that he has tried to touch base with the school system but has not been successful. They need to be more involved.

Minutes Respectfully submitted by:

Tehra Coles
City of Albany Gun Violence Task Force Intern