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**United States Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing
Federal Support for Preventing and Responding to Carjackings
Tuesday, March 1, 2022**

**Vaughn Bryant, Metropolitan Family Services
Written Testimony**

Good morning, Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and members of the Committee. My name is Vaughn Bryant, and I am the Executive Director of Metropolitan Peace Initiatives (MPI), a division of Metropolitan Family Services. Metropolitan Family Services has helped Chicago families meet the hardships of poverty, epidemics, natural disasters, world wars and economic downturns since 1857. In 2016, we formed Metropolitan Peace Initiatives to put power in communities' hands and engage residents to participate in the solution to gun violence.

I come to this work having grown up in Detroit, MI. I am the son of a Detroit police officer. I am the product of the Police Athletic League where police officers coached me in football, basketball, and baseball before going on to be a fourth-round draft choice in the 1994 NFL draft. I have spent half of my professional career in service of communities and working with law enforcement.

Metropolitan Peace Initiatives coordinates, supports and sustains a cross-agency community safety infrastructure made up of local community-based organizations rooted in the most violent areas of the City of Chicago. For the first time in Chicago's history, organizations with proven violence prevention outcomes across the city's geographies have come together to build a necessary community infrastructure dedicated to preventing violence and delivering a comprehensive set of services to heal communities at the highest risk for violence and provide opportunities for individual rehabilitation.

The root causes of crime are well documented and researched. Crime is primarily the outcome of multiple adverse social, economic, cultural, and family conditions. Just as the root causes of crime are multi-layered, so must be the systems we build to address it. With this in mind, Metropolitan Peace Initiatives is comprised of five major programs.

COMMUNITIES PARTNERING 4 PEACE (CP4P)

Chicago's fast escalating violence in 2016, which saw 762 individuals killed by guns and 4,580 individuals shot, (increases of 58% and 47% respectively), along with the unrest related to the murder of Laquan McDonald demanded a new approach. This led a group of community leaders to establish Communities Partnering 4 Peace (CP4P). CP4P is partnership of leading outreach organizations that adhere to four operating principles, restorative practices, trauma informed practices, Kingsian nonviolence and hyper-locality. CP4P is an innovative and comprehensive collaboration, convened in 2017 by Metropolitan Family Services in partnership with eight community-based organizations, to reduce violence in nine of Chicago's most violent

communities. Today it includes 14 partner agencies active in 28 Chicago communities. CP4P's mission is to engage and build trusting relationships with individuals and groups most vulnerable to gun violence, and to mobilize and provide them with a comprehensive set of services that lead to their healing and the healing of our communities. CP4P partner agencies demonstrate success and are highly skilled in violence prevention services. CP4P relies on its capable street outreach staff, who are credible messengers to the target population with a license to operate in the communities they serve. The program targets individuals most at risk of perpetrating violence or being victims, and provides:

- **Intervention by trained street outreach workers** who engage individuals with a high likelihood to shoot or be shot and create peace and non-aggression agreements;
- **Case management services** such as behavioral health, education, job training, transitional housing and re-entry support services for returning citizens; and
- **Community-based events to build community safety and solidarity called “Light in the Night.”**

METROPOLITAN PEACE ACADEMY

The Metropolitan Peace Academy is a multidisciplinary platform that offers trainings to professionalize and strengthen the fields of street outreach and community violence prevention. MPA has established core competencies, knowledge, and skills required of outreach workers and violence prevention practitioners and ensures consistent standards in how outreach workers deliver services. With a responsibility towards rehabilitation, the Peace Academy offers ongoing professional development of outreach workers and other practitioners who work with the acutely at-risk population to promote best practices. The MPA is foundational to creating a sustainable infrastructure by graduating a citywide network of outreach workers to ensure the highest probability of success in creating safer communities. The Peace Academy features an 18-week intensive curriculum shaped and taught by street outreach workers and guided by the principles of hyper-locality, nonviolence, trauma-informed practices and restorative justice.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Providing trauma informed services is foundational to MPI as it seeks to heal individuals and communities that have been impacted by community violence. Metropolitan Peace Initiatives' Behavioral Health programs offer individuals a pathway to develop their strengths, through resources and opportunities to maximize mental health stability for themselves and their families. Counseling and mental health services are client-centered, culturally sensitive and bilingual (English and Spanish). Trauma-informed and evidence-based care combines clinical expertise, research and participants' own values supporting individuals, families, and groups and offering links to community health providers for long-term care.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Through job readiness and training services, Metropolitan Peace Initiatives' Workforce Development programs offer unemployed and underemployed individuals the opportunity to

prepare for and attain meaningful and sustainable employment. Assistance includes GED attainment, utilizing the H.O.P.E Curriculum, a two-week job readiness skills training, and offering skills-based training that includes access to industry training and certification for jobs in construction, food services, plumbing, electrical, carpentry and more.

JUSTICE CORPS: LEGAL SERVICES

Through individualized, hyper-local legal services, CP4P Justice Corps offers justice-involved adults the opportunity to move past the legal issues and barriers holding them back from success. Community-based legal services are free and offered at CP4P partner organization offices keeping services available close to home. MPI's legal professionals offer assistance with employment, housing, public benefits, crime victim services, human trafficking, elder law, and domestic violence legal issues.

CP4P FACTS AND FIGURES

Of all CP4P participants, 80% are males, 73% are Black and 20% are Hispanic, with the average age of 28. CP4P communities endure more crime and gun violence – at rates three times higher – than the rest of Chicago. Residents of CP4P communities bear some of the highest risks for gunshot injuries in the city. Within those communities, CP4P participants run a 370% greater risk of gun violence than do their neighbors.

Since the start of CP4P in July of 2017, shootings and homicides declined an average of 1% per month in our target area, whereas shootings and homicides were increasing 2% per month before CP4P. This led to an overall reduction of 17.7% on average in the number of homicides and shootings per month in the first 30 months of operation.

External evaluation partners, Northwestern University's Northwestern Neighborhood Network (N3), began qualitative data analysis to better understand the participant experience with outreach, how this might vary by organization and participant, and how such insights might improve practice. A July 2020 presentation highlighted the following themes from the qualitative analysis:

- Participants look up to outreach workers. They view them as heroes, mentors, and sources of emotional and material support.
- Participants report to benefit the most from outreach workers helping them during dark times, consistently following up, positive mentoring, connecting them to social services/recreation, providing legal support, and doing community service.
- Ultimately, participants are looking for socioeconomic stability. They see involvement with street outreach as a transition from street or gang -related life to participation in the mainstream workforce.
- In response to Covid-19 and the shelter-in-place order, outreach staff have had to adapt. They face expanded job responsibilities, fluctuating morale, and increased scrutiny.

Meanwhile, participant progress has been put at risk by disruptions in services and job opportunities.

Similarly, MPI worked with the external evaluation team at N3, CP4P Data Managers, and other staff at the CP4P organizations to examine the participant-level impact/outcomes component of the evaluation. N3 released promising results in August 2021. According to Early Evidence Suggests Violence & Violent Crime Reduction:

- Gunshot victimization was 20% lower 18 months after participation and was 31% lower 24 months after participation in CP4P
- Arrests for violent crimes were 28% lower 18 months after participation and 17% lower 24 months after participation in CP4P

Correspondingly, according to a survey of participants, just over 15% of CP4P participants experienced an increase in full or part-time employment and another 15% increased their educational level after program participation. In fact, job employment services rank highest in the services participants were most often referred to followed by educational resources, food assistance, housing, mental health, and legal resources.

According to the City of Chicago Mayor's Office of Violence Reduction's Violence Reduction Dashboard, there have been roughly 2000 vehicular hijacking victimizations in Chicago since January 1, 2021. This crisis has left victims traumatized and communities on alert. In response, MPI took action to implement a targeted intervention within communities to mitigate and respond to this crisis. MPI engaged its hyper-local community-based organizations to address the following objectives:

- Develop a community response to the carjacking crisis.
- Provide education and outreach to communities and residents on prevention strategies.
- Provide intervention supports to proactively prevent carjacking from taking place in the targeted communities
- Work in coordination with MPI and other community stakeholders to come together in addressing this crisis.

The purpose of this initiative was to implement a 30-Day community action pilot to understand at a deeper level the breadth and nature of the carjacking issue facing communities under CP4P's umbrella and across the city, targeting 16 Chicago wards.

We extended the pilot to 90 Days and while we saw a slight drop in carjackings in the wards we served, we did not have the funding to formalize the initiative and properly evaluate the impact. While carjacking and its increase is an alarming trend for all involved, we know that carjacking is one of many symptoms of the root causes of violence/crime that were only exacerbated by the COVID-pandemic.

By now, we all recognize that COVID validated long known disparities in Black and Hispanic communities across the country. In particular, the south and west sides of Chicago, which experience the highest levels of gun violence, also experience the highest COVID rate. The root causes of higher crime and lower health outcomes are:

1. Family isolation and lack of access to support structures
2. Lack of community cohesion to improve public safety
3. Lack of primary prevention structure
4. Early academic failure and lack of school attachment
5. Lack of effective re-entry strategies and transitional service support
6. Inadequate government coordination and accountability
7. Unaddressed trauma due to poor access to health and mental health care services
8. Normalization of violence
9. Lack of economic investment, workforce development and family economic success
10. Lack of community policing strategies that build public trust

A history of slavery, convict leasing, Jim Crow, housing discrimination and mass incarceration has taken its toll. Chicago remains one of the most segregated cities in the United States. Public trust in our institutions continued to suffer because of bad actors the likes of Police Commander Jon Burge, found guilty of torturing approximately 120 and coercing confessions. Operation Greylord is an FBI case where 92 officials faced indictment and many convicted including, Judge Thomas J. Maloney for taking bribes for fixing murder cases. The recent shootings of Laquan McDonald, Adam Toledo, and Anthony Alvarez have police community relations at an all-time low.

The Community Training Academy (CTA), designed to be a community led training, was co-created by Communities Partnering 4 Peace (CP4P), the Chicago Police Department (CPD), and other community organizations to provide a framework and curriculum for community-based and community-specific trainings for Probationary Police Officers (PPOs), District Coordination Officers (DCOs) and officers recently transferred into a district. Through a twenty-four-hour curriculum, every police district learns to apply a hyperlocal lens to the communities they serve. To date we have trained 100 police officers across eight police districts since October 2020. Based on the survey results, ninety-five percent of the officers had a positive experience in the training and recommend all CPD officers complete the training.

By utilizing an asset-based community development framework, restorative practice and hyper-local focus, the CTA introduces specific dynamics within a given community and deepens understanding of key historical factors related to policing. The training emphasizes the role of the CPD and individual officers in creating communities that are both safe and just. CPD officers learn directly from community members and vetted stakeholders about key assets and challenges in their neighborhoods, develop an understanding of the biases that prevent authentic community-police engagement, and engage in critical conversations with key adults and young people in the community.

Additionally, CP4P leadership meets on a bi-monthly basis with local Chicago Police Commanders to identify local violence hot spots, coordinate interventions and address quality of life issues in local neighborhoods. CP4P partners continue to engage with the City of Chicago Aldermen, the Chicago Department of Public Health, the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services while always intervening with the highest risk individuals and their families. Law enforcement cannot provide the healing that comes with social services supports and interventions but can work in tandem with a violence prevention infrastructure that provides options to steer youth in alternate directions. Violence prevention can result in fewer individual contacts with law enforcement freeing up law enforcement to focus on larger issues. As you consider ways the federal government can address issues of violent crime, sustainable funding that brings violence prevention to scale must be part of the solution. The federal government has already begun to do so.

Federal CARES Act funding assisted Metropolitan Peace Initiatives at the onset of the COVID pandemic. Like many cities, Chicago experienced an uptick in violence. However, because of the community violence prevention infrastructure that was built, MPI was able to coordinate and standardize street outreach services to prevent and/or reduce community violence (homicide and retaliation) with the ultimate intent of preventing gun violence while also providing wrap around services to address needs directly related to the Coronavirus pandemic. In addition to its normal violence prevention services, CP4P organizations utilized CARES funding to: 1) Host events in the community to promote safety during the pandemic while strategizing to reduce violence; 2) Provide proper protection for outreach teams to canvass safely in the neighborhood; 3) Distribute supplies to improve Safe Haven locations and maintain them safely during COVID; 4) PPE equipment distribution for individuals and community members; 5) Provide community survival bags of groceries and other essential items to families in need; 6) CARES funding also helped stabilize employment and recruit new members to the team to help with information sharing and distribution needs. Outreach workers built on their trusted relationships to pivot and expand their roles to include community health workers.

We could do so much more with additional federal investment.

- American Rescue Plan funds allow local governments to utilize ARP funds to prevent or address gun violence in cities as increased gun violence and the need for expanded violence intervention programs can be traced to the impact of the pandemic, and violence intervention professionals are performing essential frontline work to protect the public and interrupt gun violence
- Medicaid can reimburse certain community violence intervention programs, like Hospital-Based Violence Interventions.
- [Five agencies are making changes to existing federal funding streams](#) across 26 programs to direct vital support to community violence intervention programs including the Department of Justice, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Education, and Department of Labor.

The Build Back Better Act includes historic investments in community violence intervention programs like MPI. The proposed funding in the Build Back Better Act would be a targeted investment of \$5 billion in America's most impacted communities. This would be a necessary investment to root out violence before it happens and would be a complement to other public safety strategies. The investment is grounded in work already being done by the Department of Justice and Department of Health and Human Services.

Federal investment in violence prevention interventions that remove constraints that prevent individuals from a more positive path, like Metropolitan Peace Initiatives, is an investment in alternate choices, alternate paths. From initial outreach and violence interruption to engagement with case management and referrals to supportive services, individuals are presented with opportunities to express their talents in a more positive way.

In conclusion, we are here today because violent crime is costly to every one of us. However, with strategic investment focused on a multi-faceted approach that is inclusive of funding and support for building community prevention infrastructures, we can realize healing and restoration and the resulting reduction in crime.

CP4P community partner, New Life Centers, knows firsthand that transformation is possible. Inspired by 1 Thessalonians 2:8 that says, "we cared so much for you that we were willing to share with you not only Creator's good story but our own lives as well. That is how deep our love for you has become"—their mission is young people and their families connecting with Christ and Community through restorative justice, safe spaces, and life-on-life relationships. Benny Estrada, Director of Street Outreach, shares the life-changing impact violence prevention services have had on the youth they serve:

"I am working with a young person who has a pending auto theft case and is struggling with his home life. Over the past year, we have been steady in ensuring that he has the support that he needs and have accompanied him in his journey to attain his goals. One of them being his attendance in school which we have seen a dramatic increase in. This young person has religiously been attending programming with us and I have personally seen a change in his behavior where his attitude has shifted and his focus has changed to the more positive aspects of life."

"We have worked with young people who have stolen a car for the economic opportunity that it presents. We have been working with young people to change their mindset about these and other crimes and have focused more on the impact that their behavior has caused and can cause to a neighbor or a friend or a community member. The most change I have seen is when this person reaches out to me or my team before doing something negative. I am most proud that this person stops to re-evaluate his actions and then change course irrespective of the peer pressure."



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Ultimately, participants are looking for socioeconomic stability. They see involvement with street outreach as a transition from street or gang -related life to participation in the mainstream workforce. CP4P participant data demonstrates this desire. During the Risk Reduction/Intake Assessment, 43% of participants noted they were interested in employment services, and of those participants, 60% enrolled in employment services. Likewise, 28% of participants noted interest in education services, and of those participants, 39% enrolled in education services. This intervention model of individual wrap around services removes constraints that prevent individuals from a more positive path so that individuals can express their talents in a more positive way.

We are having a demonstrative, life changing impact across the City of Chicago for hundreds of individuals. But Metropolitan Peace Initiatives will not reduce violent crime in the City on its own.

Understanding that effective solutions to community challenges require residents' active support and engagement, CP4P's model puts the power in communities' hands. Community-based organizations form the core of CP4P's implementation model and engage residents to participate in the solution to gun violence while forging closer partnerships with public agencies and the police department. Along with law enforcement, CP4P's community-based infrastructure is part of a larger crime reduction ecosystem.