

**Testimony of Natasha Danielá de Lima McGlynn,
Interim Executive Director of the Anti-Violence Partnership of Philadelphia,
to the City of Philadelphia Council Committee on Public Safety
March 23, 2021**

Good morning. My name is Natasha Danielá de Lima McGlynn and I'm the Interim Executive Director of the Anti-Violence Partnership of Philadelphia, or AVP.

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to share our expertise and work with the City Council's Committee on Public Safety in support of Resolution 210090, which is intended to examine more equitable solutions to crime scene cleanup policies and practices that currently place the logistical and financial burden on the families of homicide victims.

As advocates for victims of crime, family members and friends of homicide victims, and communities impacted by homicide and violence, we very much appreciate the light you're shining on this critical issue.

First, let me provide a brief overview of the scope of our work and expertise.

AVP is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) victim service agency that was founded nearly 40 years ago. We are one of six victim service agencies in Philadelphia. Our mission is to end the cycle of violence by providing a wide range of intervention, prevention, and support services to children, youth, and adults traumatized by exposure to violence, to help them rebuild their lives in the aftermath of violence. Our dedicated staff of therapists, counselors, and victim advocates serve approximately 3,000 clients annually.

In 2016, AVP was one of seven national organizations awarded a grant from the United States Department of Justice's Office of Victims of Crime to enhance systemic responses to complex homicides. AVP conducted an extensive investigative study exploring the experiences and needs of survivors of intra-familial homicide through interviews with survivors. In addition to the profound trauma interviewees described, many reported the unexpected ordeal of having to clean up the crime scene. While this experience is not unique to intra-familial acts of violence, this key finding exposed a glaring oversight in existing policies and practices that impact victims

and survivors across Philadelphia; specifically, current practices direct the Philadelphia Police Department and support personnel to travel to the crime scenes to gather evidence and conduct an investigation, but do not address the need for cleaning any biohazardous material left at the scene.

Existing literature suggests that proper crime scene cleanup cannot be performed by an average citizen without certification and training. Additionally, there are a number of regulations on the local, state, and federal levels when it specifically comes to biohazard cleaning. Yet while these rules and regulations exist to protect us from health risks by exposure to dangerous chemicals, toxins, and diseases, when it comes to crime scenes, victims and survivors --in their state of traumatic shock-- are typically left to clean up the crime scene themselves, without any guidance or assistance from the City.

Consequently, victims and survivors clean up the blood and bodily remains of their loved ones at great physical and psychological costs to themselves.

There are currently no policies or practices across the City's administrative agencies that make crime scene cleanup services accessible and available to families and communities impacted by violence.

Recognizing these notable deficiencies, AVP initiated a project to explore crime scene cleanups. Today we release our findings in a report entitled *Blood on Our Hands: Addressing Crime Scene Cleanup in the City of Philadelphia*. The production of this report was made possible by subsequent development to our intra-familial homicide grant. This report is the first venture of its kind by our agency. It exemplifies our initiative in seeking novel and pragmatic solutions to the problems our clients and the citizens of Philadelphia face as a result of incidents of violence.

In identifying the circumstances faced by victims and survivors of homicide in particular, we note the disproportionate impact on Philadelphians who are Black and Latine. Of the 2,167 shootings in 2020, 84% of victims were Black and 9% were Latine. The same racial inequity is true for homicide co-victimization: 83% of homicides between 2016 and 2020 involved Black victims and 10% involved Latine victims. In the status quo, crime scene cleanup is part of a larger system that further marginalizes Black and Latine people in the aftermath of homicide and

violence. This marginalization is unjust and emblematic of the systemic racism that communities of color continue to endure.

Lastly, our report proposes changes to policies and practices at the City level in support of victims and survivors, ranging from the City assuming the logistical and financial responsibility for the removal of biohazardous materials from crime scenes, to providing comprehensive resources to the public that educate and support survivors in the aftermath of homicide. These solutions are intended to be tangible, practical, and implementable.

It goes without saying that the past year has been difficult for our city. Between the COVID-19 pandemic and a gun violence epidemic, we have been hurting in unprecedented ways. Yet the occurrence of this syndemic has given us an opportunity to come together as a community and explore the disparities and unnecessary hardships that prevent children, families, and communities of color, from accessing opportunities that create the path to a fulfilling life.

Thank you to our clients, for trusting us and for courageously being here with us today to share their experiences. This is not an easy matter to discuss. In fact, several clients declined the opportunity to share their experiences with cleaning up crime scenes due to the traumatic nature of recounting such experience.

To our clients and those in Philadelphia who have lost someone to violence: we are all here because of you -- we are honored and humbled to serve you.

Thank you again for holding this hearing; for examining the additional burdens imposed on victims and survivors in the aftermath of their loved ones' murder; and for allowing AVP to be here today at the table. We stand ready to assist in any way possible to help ensure victims and survivors in Philadelphia are served and supported to the best of our abilities.

At AVP, we have a saying here: "Let the work speak for itself." On that note, I turn it over to my colleagues, Stéphanie Le Clair and Sam Margolius.