

P H I L A D E L P H I A  
Child and Family  
Therapy Training Center

April 27, 2021

City Hall, Office 215  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
215-686-2181

Dear Mayor Jim Kenney,

The recent newspaper article titled, “Record pace for violence in Phila” (Philadelphia Inquirer, Saturday March 13, 2021), prompted our group to reach out to you. Our purpose with this brief communication is threefold.

First, we acknowledge the unyielding effort that your staff and you exert daily in responding to youth gun violence. Doing everything in your power such as pursuing the safe and protected opening of community recreation centers, curbing the flow of guns, and solving then seeking a just verdict in every adjudicated murder case are important pieces to solving this puzzle.

Second, rather than advance the idea that another meeting will quickly generate an expert derived plan for moving forward, we implore you to consider another framework. Publicly adopt, repeatedly tout, and then collectively advance the position that youth gun violence is a public health issue driven by trauma. How so? Black male youth do not feel safe, secure in their community, nor protected by the adults around them. Feeling vulnerable and devalued, they literally believe that Black lives do not matter. With internal alarms constantly warning, “fear for your physical and emotional well-being,” they understandably fight for their survival.

Finally, assemble the relevant members of our community best postured to come to the table and help us see, understand, and respond to

this public health crisis. What are the basic working guidelines for this group to consider? Our longtime collective professional efforts in mental health working with families fearful of letting us in the door has taught us the following:

1. **Trauma informed.** Touch the truth of every stakeholder's distress. For example, communicate to our youth, "Of course you consider carrying a gun, you want to protect yourself because you fear no one else is doing it."
2. **Strength-based.** Believe then repeatedly communicate to all stakeholders (especially young Black males), "You are a worthy and dignified human being. You have much to offer yourself, family, our schools, and community."
3. **Collaborate.** Signal "we value our youth, caregivers, and their community" and "each of you are important to us" by emphatically taking the position, "We want to make a change! We need to do better! What are we missing? Please help us."
4. **Co-discover.** Begin a collaborative process by asking youth six to 25 years of age, their families, and important members of their community to "examine what has worked in other cities and determine if we think these approaches will work for us." We believe that this strategy lays the groundwork for addressing another large anti-gun violence group's recent request to add \$100 million to the City's upcoming budget to build safer communities over the coming three years.
5. **Nurturance instills resilience.** Know that immediate intervention is necessary, but long-term prevention is key.
6. **Change is disruptive.** Appreciate that this systems-based approach goes against the grain and perturbs the City's existing structure and organization.

Thank you for considering our perspective. This is an urgent life altering, life threatening matter requiring immediate attention. We respectfully request a response prior to Mother's Day, celebrated on May 9 of this year. Please know that Dr. Simms serves as our group's contact liaison and the undersigned remain readily available to assist each of you in facilitating this vital and necessary process.

Respectfully,

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