

Remarks by Natasha Danielá de Lima McGlynn  
Executive Director, Anti-Violence Partnership of Philadelphia  
October 25, 2021

Good morning and thank you all for being here. I am honored to have this opportunity to share how the Collaborative intends to operate to assist victims of violence and prevent future violence.

I'd like to first give some background:

Since 1983, our organization, the Anti-Violence Partnership of Philadelphia, or "AVP," has been on the frontlines of addressing the full cycle of violence in the Philadelphia area by providing a wide range of free counseling, support, training, violence intervention and prevention, and psychoeducational services to youth, adults, and families impacted by violence. Our dedicated staff of professional therapists, counselors, victim advocates, and interns serve approximately 3,000 clients annually.

As a result of the exponential increase in violence this past year, we experienced an alarming phenomenon: the waitlist for those seeking our counseling services increased by over 600%. This amount drastically surpasses the capacity of the twelve therapists and counselors we currently have on staff, each of whom have a caseload of approximately 24 cases.

We began to ask ourselves: What does this mean? If an individual calls us for counseling services because, emotionally, they are ready to begin the healing process, and then we tell them, "Sorry, we have to put you on our waitlist," does this mean we are telling them their healing journeys will have to wait to begin?

We should not be dictating how and when someone heals. It is our responsibility to help victims heal the minute they reach out.

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Yet in the absence of proper resources and with limited funding to expand, there is only so much we can do.

Let me rephrase that: there is only so much ONE organization can do.

We are currently standing in AVP's West Philadelphia office. This office has been in operation since 2018, but has been temporarily closed since March 2020. After an extensive assessment of the space's use, one that also considered the dramatic increase in violence in the West and Southwest neighborhoods that are within our catchment, we further thought: *Can we transform this office into a community-centric space for AVP and our partners to collaborate and coordinate our services to optimize responsiveness and care to those impacted by violence?*

This thought is being materialized into the West/Southwest Collaborative to Reduce Gun Violence, a multi-cultural, multi-generational, multi-organizational coordination of expertise, skills, and services from the public, academic, nonprofit, and grassroots levels to collectively address the scale and complexity of gun violence in West and Southwest, two geographic areas that have the highest concentrated violence in Philadelphia, and which have particularly endured staggering increases in gun violence in the past year.

The vision is simple:

**Together, we can end the cycle of violence.**

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We have thus transformed this office into a shared communal hub for the Collaborative. By convening AVP, Beloved Care Project, CARES and Penn Injury Science Center, in one centralized space, it allows each of our organizations to work in close collaboration to complement services, align programmatic activities, and maximize responses to the immediate individual and community needs of the surrounding neighborhoods.

It also enables a centralized infrastructure, structured processes for a common agenda, shared performance measurements, ongoing evaluation, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities between our organizations. More than anything, it also enables us to hold each other accountable to doing the work -- to being in the community, working with the community, bringing the community together; to listening, and doing better, each and every one of us.

In this transformed space, we will provide activities in a communal setting that address existing gaps in community resources (e.g., ongoing food assistance) and promote healing, recovery, and violence prevention through traditional and non-traditional therapies and healing practices -- so that if, for example, you're on AVP's waitlist for counseling services, you can sign up for an array of other support services (e.g., support groups, healing circles, yoga therapy, art therapy).

As my colleagues before me said: complex problems require complex solutions.

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When we come together, we can make a collective impact. We can decrease incidents of victimizations; we can strengthen community protective factors; and we can end the cycle of violence.

This incredible feat has been quite the labor of love in the face of many challenges. I am proud of and grateful for those who have been helping with this transformation, many of whom stand before us -- thank you for your full support.

I would be remiss to not acknowledge that this vision was made possible because of women -- largely, women of color who have personally experienced the effects of violence in their lives and communities. These women strongly believe in the possibility of change, and are taking bold measures to lead such change. These women have been supported, incredibly, by our brothers -- thank you.

In the midst of sadness, grief, loss, and pain, there is hope and there is formidable strength. And there is a whole community making sure we can all move forward -- a community of incredible folks, like those in this room.

Thank you, District Attorney Krasner, for your continuous support, courage, and conviction. We are endlessly grateful to your incredible staff -- thank you, friends.

Thank you, Councilmember Gauthier, for your fearless leadership, ongoing support, and dedication and service to all Philadelphians.

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And thank you to Mr. Khalif, Dr. Myra, and Sara: you are the dream team. Thank you for your passion, dedication, and drive to make today happen. I am humbled to be your colleague.

We are excited to embark on this new venture, and even more excited to have you be a part of it.

Thank you.