

Testimony of Daniel Schramm, President, Brookland Neighborhood Civic Association

March 27, 2019 Budget Oversight Hearing, Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety

- Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice
- Metropolitan Police Department

April 11, 2019 Budget Oversight Hearing, Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety

- Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement

On behalf of the Brookland Neighborhood Civic Association, I am testifying to urge the Council to fully fund the NEAR Act and other public-health focused efforts to address the root causes of gun violence on our streets. We desperately need far greater resources in community policing, assistance to community leaders and organizations, and building a much larger network of violence interrupters who can effectively engage at-risk youth before they make the life-altering mistake of engaging in lethal violence.

On March 9, just a couple weeks ago, we had a shootout near the Taft school and around 20th and Monroe NE, in which no less than 20 shots were fired, one striking a Metro Access van, and sending residents to their floors for fear of being shot through their windows. This latest shooting comes on top of a rash of gunfire incidents in the past few months:

- Gunshots were heard the day before the most recent incident, around 17th/18th and Newton/Otis, as well as 22nd and Randolph.
- A homicidal shooting occurred on the 1700 block of Hamlin in February, inside a business on the same block the city is locating the Ward 5 Short-term Family Housing Facility.
- A shooting February 9 on the 2000 block of Newton St NE in which 3 victims were shot in a vehicle in a drive by.
- A homicidal shooting on the 1800 block of Queens Chapel Rd NE.
- A shooting January 19 in the 1300 block of Brentwood Rd. NE. in which a male victim was shot in the leg.
- On January 1, there was a drive-by on the 2000 block of Rhode Island Ave in which a male victim was struck; this was between the 7-11 and Good Foods in an area frequented by many pedestrians and occurred in the middle of the afternoon.
- Gunshots fired around Otis and 17th and 18th on December 27, 2018.
- Gunshots in broad daylight at 12th and Monroe NE (this incident occurring immediately after an exchange of gunfire on Franklin Ave in Langdon Park).
- A running gun battle around the Turkey Thicket playground August 21, 2018 near tennis courts where many people were out and had to run for cover.

This is all within the past 6 months, and probably does not include all incidents.

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We have a public safety crisis on our hands. Brookland residents do not feel safe on our own streets and even in our own yards and homes. At the same time, I know I speak for many residents in believing that we need to take a public health lens to the problem of preventing violence in the first place. This is by no means to the exclusion of the need for effective law enforcement and traditional tools of criminal justice. Those resources too must receive full and adequate funding. But we know that they alone are not sufficient to address root causes of violent behavior. The most hopeful approach in this respect is to fully fund and implement the NEAR Act, the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, and the Cure the Streets program.

At our March 19 BNCA meeting, Council member Kenyan McDuffie and 5th District Commander William Fitzgerald, who were in attendance to respond to the community regarding the shoot-out, both identified the NEAR Act and Cure the Streets as critical to efforts to reduce gun violence.¹ The Council member identified ways in which the NEAR Act could be better funded in order to bring resources to Ward 5 that are sorely lacking. One of the more shocking statistics we heard in this regard is that Wards 1 through 5 received in the last budget, collectively, only a couple hundred thousand dollars.

This is clearly inadequate, particularly in Ward 5, given the increase in homicidal shootings we are seeing. Deputy Mayor Kevin Donohue has reported that homicides in the District were up forty percent in 2018. In 2019, homicides are already up sixty-four percent from 2018.²

At the same time, violence intervention and ONSE programming, where they are being implemented on a small scale, are already having results. Attorney General Karl Racine testified on January 31 that at Ward Eight and Ward Five Cure the Streets pilot sites, they are seeing significantly reduced shootings, and no homicides over a five-month period. However, the surrounding “cluster” in Ward 5, had several non-fatal shootings, and five homicides in the last 5 month period.³ These statistics provide some early evidence that the violence-interrupter model can make a difference. Unfortunately, we do not have this program in the Brookland area where so many shootings are occurring. We need it badly, and we would like to see all of ONSE’s work funded sufficiently to make a difference in our neighborhood this year.

¹ <https://wjla.com/news/local/dc-residents-demanding-end-to-gun-violence-to-walk-to-scene-of-shooting-caught-on-video>

² Email from Council member Kenyan McDuffie, Sharing My Budget Priorities Letter (Feb. 28, 2019).

³ <https://oag.dc.gov/release/testimony-next-steps-districts-public-health-based>

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