

**Statement of Dr. Jacquelyn Henry  
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On the release of  
*Responding to Gang, Crew and Youth Violence in the District of  
Columbia; A Blueprint for Action*  
June 12, 2009

Thank you Council Member Graham, Chairman Gray, and Mayor Fenty for giving us the opportunity to present this report.

Young people in the District of Columbia are all too often involved in and targeted by such crimes as homicides, armed robberies, and aggravated assaults. These violent acts are increasingly being committed by younger and younger youth, by girls, and most troubling, by organized or loosely organized groups of young people.

In 2008, 16 juveniles were arrested in homicide cases, up from 10 in 2007. Despite an overall decline in the recorded crime rate over the past four years, the city has seen a 20 percent increase in juvenile arrests during the same period, from 3,129 in 2004 to 3,753 in 2008. Alarming, the most marked increases were seen for the most violent crimes.

There is no short of concern or effort regarding youth violence. Over the last year, both the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and community-based networks have worked to expand and intensify their efforts on gang and crew violence. Response to critical incidents has improved tremendously as evidenced by case closure rates and arrests.

Similar progress, however, has not been achieved in *preventing* violent incidents.

To stop youth violence we need to fully coordinate all of our intervention efforts, regardless of funding source. We need also to develop a range of prevention strategies that provide positive alternatives for young people.

To stop youth violence we have to keep pushing towards a full transformation of our educational systems. We have made great progress in that arena but we can't stop, a quality education for all young people is perhaps the most significant contribution we can make to curbing youth violence.

To achieve this next threshold of success, District residents, MPD, community organizations, and public agencies must work together in an intensive and concerted manner.

The purpose of this report is to present a Blueprint for Action that frames a set of community-based and community-driven strategies to reduce youth violence and those factors that contribute to it.

For many reasons, this report shouldn't be necessary. Over the past fifteen years, a score of plans and reports on youth violence prevention in DC have been prepared by both public and private agencies. Countless prevention and intervention efforts have been launched with great fanfare, almost always to slip away quietly for lack of political, financial or community support. Some efforts, such as the Roving Leaders and the Gang Intervention Partnership that served the Columbia Heights neighborhood are recognized as national models and have served as the basis for community based prevention and intervention work across the country.

Through the process of creating this report, we understand clearly that the District – its government, service providers, and residents – can turn the gang problem around. This Blueprint identifies the challenges the city faces with gang and crew violence and marries them with descriptions of methods that work here and in other jurisdictions.

It is our hope that the findings and recommendations in this report will this time lead to strategic, coordinated and sustained action by both public officials and community leaders, and will curb the cycle of youth violence we are experiencing and build community capacity that leads to positive outcomes for youth.

I am proud that we were able contribute to this important work.

Now I would like to ask Richard Flintrop, the co-author of this report and the Director of Policy and Planning at the Collaborative Council to briefly highlight the report's findings and recommendations.