

## **The Public Safety Task Force on Youth Violence Recommendations**

The Public Safety Task Force on Youth Violence has met for several weeks to answer the question posed by Mayor-Elect Ron Dellums: How can we understand and lessen the causes of youth violence? Task Force members have attended two Neighbor to Neighbor meetings sponsored by Mayor-Elect Dellums, interviewed youth, residents, experts, city and county officials, and gathered hundreds of pages of documentation on youth violence. In addition, Task Force members have reviewed past city and county efforts as well as state and federal initiatives in their search for answers to youth violence.

### *How can we understand the causes of youth violence?*

The causes of youth violence can be best understood by using the public health model of risk assessment. Communities can assess the risk factors found in their communities and determine how they may be causing and contributing to youth violence. The risk factors that contribute to youth violence include – poverty and economic disparity, community deterioration, discrimination and oppression, illiteracy and school failure, availability of alcohol and drugs, availability of firearms, youth gang involvement, child victimization and maltreatment, cognitive and neurological deficits and negative family dynamics.

### *How can we lessen the causes of youth violence?*

Protective or resilience factors can be assessed and enhanced to counteract the negative effects of risk factors and lessen the cause of youth violence. Protective factors include – economic capital, safe environment, social capital, quality services and institutions, meaningful opportunities for participation, positive attachments and relationships, good physical and mental health, emotional and cognitive competence, artistic and creative opportunities, and ethnic, racial and inter-group relations. The City of Oakland has articulated this view in the *2003 Violence Prevention Plan*, the *Violence Prevention and Public Safety Act of 2004 (Measure Y)*, and the *Three-Year Delinquency Prevention Plan*. The County of Alameda has also adopted this model

in the *2005 Violence Prevention: Alameda County's Blueprint* and *Violence in Oakland: A Public Health Crisis*. These are comprehensive plans that call for enacting best practice prevention strategies to reduce the risk factors and enhance the protective factors before the onset of violence.

The Task Force on Youth Violence believes that these risk factors, identified in the City and County plans, continue to threaten the youth of Oakland. The Task Force believes that we can lessen the causes of youth violence in Oakland by supporting programs that are proven to be effective in reducing risk factors and by supporting effective programs that are proven to enhance protective factors. Oakland Police estimate that most homicides in Oakland are gang related and involve drugs in some way. The two risk factors addressed by this recommendation are the availability of firearms and gang involvement. Therefore the Public Safety Task Force on Youth Violence recommends the following:

The Mayor should set a goal of reducing youth gun homicide by 75%, by leading a focused strategy of violence prevention, cultural intervention and police enforcement. The Mayor should lead the effort to place violence prevention curriculum in every Oakland elementary and middle school, modeling the success of the Safe Passages Middle School strategy. The Mayor should launch a city-wide effort aimed at high school age gang involved youth to reduce youth firearm possession through a campaign to promote non-violent dispute resolution and peacekeeping that challenges violent and retaliatory youth gang culture, modeled on the success of the Youth Alive program "Teens on Target", the Ella Baker Center's "Silence the Violence", and gang peace protocols modeled in Los Angeles, Boston and Newark. The Mayor should support the ongoing collaboration of the State Attorney General and Oakland Police Department's efforts to curtail the secondary market of illegal guns and to trace those and stolen guns used in crime. The Mayor should also support the necessary budget increase to

allow the Police Department to have the sufficient number of officers in the Weapons Unit to enforce California's Armed and Prohibited law and all other Oakland gun ordinances.

The Task Force on Youth Violence believes that the following strategies will also reduce gun violence in Oakland and should be considered by the Mayor:

1. The Mayor's Office could make peacekeeping and gang disarmament a priority by establishing a Peace Council composed of men and women who have shown effectiveness in working with violence prevention, gang truce processes and restorative justice.
2. The Mayor's Office could follow the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue guidelines and actively pursue a city-wide disarmament program, following international leadership programs that the Mayor-elect has been associated with (his work in South Africa for example). He could also join with members of Family and Friends of Murder Victims to humanize the tragedy and devastating loss of life firearms cause Oakland.
3. The Mayor's Office could start a "No Gun Campaign" for citizens to turn in illegal guns with immunity and then follow-up in 1 month with a police, parole, probation suppression campaign targeting ex-offenders and hi-risk youth.
4. The Mayor's Office could initiate a public safety education campaign "Get Guns Off the Street" or "Lock Up Guns at Home" to educate Oakland residents about gun safety.
5. The Mayor's Office should support all of the recommendations of the County Public Health Dept's recent report: *Violence in Oakland*.
6. The Mayor's Office should review and renew commitment to the action plan in the *City Violence Prevention Plan of 2003*.
7. The Mayor's Office should support all the recommendations in the *County's Violence Prevention Blueprint 2005*.
8. The Mayor's Office should encourage the use of Measure Y funds to increase youth leadership and violence prevention programs in elementary & middle schools.

9. Oakland has many laws regulating firearms; however an audit from the Legal Community Against Violence could be completed to identify necessary new laws.
10. The Mayor-Elect could join Mayors Against Illegal Guns and look at clamping down on Oakland's secondary gun market.
11. The Mayor's Office should require that the OPD & ATF resume tracing crime guns through the Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative protocols.
12. The Mayor's Office should increase the size of the OPD Weapons Unit and support the Chief's collaboration with the State AG's Office.
13. The Mayor's Office should to continue to support Operation Ceasefire and double number of offenders targeted.
14. The Mayor's Office could increase the use of ShotSpotters in high crime neighborhoods.
15. The Mayor's Office could support legislation to require ballistic fingerprinting on all handguns in California.