



**Violence Prevention Task Force Annual Report  
2023**

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## History

The Violence Prevention Task Force (VPTF) was created as a product of then-Council President Scott's Biennial Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan Ordinance, which was passed in April of 2020. Originally convened on September 17, 2020 and led by then-Baltimore City Health Commissioner Dr. Letitia Dzirasa, the task force was driven by the goal to develop a Violence Prevention Framework, which would go on to inform Baltimore's first ever Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan (CVPP). The CVPP, a five year plan, laid out an extensive road map to drive a holistic, public health centered, and trauma-informed approach to reducing gun violence and improving general public safety in Baltimore City.

## Mission

Mayor Scott set forth a goal to expand membership for the Violence Prevention Task Force, assigning the Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) and the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE) the responsibility to reconvene and co-share the management of the task force. The new vision of the task force went beyond the CVPP and broadened into a more robust and open-ended set of guiding goals:

1. Implementing violence reduction strategies in collaboration with partners
2. Providing ongoing training and technical assistance to programs and services
3. Collecting data and reviewing results from performance measures and indicators

## Membership

With a new guiding set of goals, the Scott Administration then expanded the VPTF membership to go beyond the legislatively-mandated agencies. The current membership is as follows:

- Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (co-chair)
- Baltimore City Health Department\* (co-chair)
- Baltimore Police Department\*
- Mayor's Office of Employment Development
- Office of Equity and Civil Rights
- Department of Housing and Community Development\*
- Department of Public Works\*
- Baltimore City Recreation and Parks\*
- Department of Social Services\*
- Department of Transportation\*
- Baltimore City Fire Department\*
- Baltimore City Public School System\*
- Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office\*

- Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services\*
- Housing Authority of Baltimore City\*
- Mayor’s Office of Children and Family Success\*
- Office of Emergency Management\*
- Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services\*
- State Department of Juvenile Services\*
- Mayor’s Office of African American Male Engagement

\*Indicates that the office’s membership was legislatively mandated

With an expanded membership list in place, the VPTF was relaunched in April of 2023 to deepen coordination between partner organizations, with a focus on youth violence prevention, and has since met 3 times. Upon its relaunch, members established three subgroups, all co-chaired by VPTF participants. The missions and accomplishments of the three subgroups, School Based Violence Intervention Task Force, Equity Task Force, and BCPSS Student Case Management Task Force, are described in the following section.

## Workgroups

### **School Based Violence Intervention Task Force – Safe Students, Safe Schools Subgroup**

*Chair(s): MONSE Gun Violence Prevention Associate Director Crystal Miller & BCHD Director of the Office of Youth and Trauma Services Aisha Burgess*

The School Based Violence and Intervention Sub-workgroup is chaired by the Director of BCHD’s Office of Youth and Trauma Services (OYTS) and MONSE’s Associate Director of Gun Violence Prevention. The purpose of this subgroup, dubbed “Safe Students, Safe Schools,” is twofold, with BCHD focused on violence prevention through universal school programming focused on social and emotional learning, and MONSE focused on intervention to support students classified as “high-risk.”

#### **1. BCHD School-Based Violence Prevention**

##### PEER GROUPS

BCHD collaborates with 3 previously identified high schools- Renaissance, Achievement and Coppin Academy- to provide weekly peer groups, youth development and mentoring to select students identified by school administrators. Peer groups were held during the academic school year and the Summer 2023. During this period 71 students participated in groups. Students participating in peer groups were introduced to 988, suicide prevention and an abuse intervention program titled Safe Dates, which focuses on healthy relationships, warning signs of dating violence and building help seeking skills. OYTS partners with community-based partners like I AM Mentality, on content development for peer groups.

## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: YOUTH AMBASSADORS

In Spring 2023, staff recruited and engaged 8 high school youth to serve as Youth Ambassadors for the OYTS. Youth work 10 hours per month and are compensated at \$15/hour for working 100 hours with staff to perform community outreach, to develop violence prevention, mental and sexual health messaging, to learn about suicide risk, to conduct peer education, and to provide feedback and recommendations on model programs and frameworks addressing youth violence, trauma and mental health. These YAs have been heavily involved in several high profile initiatives, including assisting in the response to the July 2023 Brooklyn Day mass shooting, participating in peer groups to build out the Youth Violence Reduction Framework, and co-designing an integrated youth mental health model with the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center.

### 2. *MONSE School Based Violence Intervention Programming (SBVIP)*

MONSE has been leading efforts to establish school-based violence intervention pilot programs in four Baltimore City public schools — Mergenthaler Vocational Technical High School, Carver Vocational Technical High School, Digital Harbor High School, and Edmondson Westside High School.

MONSE is actively working to develop a memorandum of understanding with BCPSS to govern this work. The Agency will pursue an iterative program design that prioritizes the availability of immediate support services in the pilot schools in early 2024 while ensuring full program implementation by the start of the 2024/2025 school year.

Service providers are actively engaging in the contracting process and are expected to begin work ahead of the 2024 summer break.

### **Equity Task Force**

*Chair(s): Chief Equity Officer Dana Moore*

The Mayor tasked Baltimore's Chief Equity Officer to create a task force on structural racism to identify key policies and practices within the city — spanning law enforcement, housing, employment, health, education, transportation, and environment — that contribute to structural racism, with particular attention to conditions that elevate individual and community risk for violence.

The task force is in its infancy stages, with membership still being solidified. In addition to commitments from the Office of Equity and Civil Rights, the Mayor's Office of Employment Development, and the Baltimore City Health Department there is anticipated participation from the Baltimore Police Department, the City's Department of Housing, Baltimore City School System, the City's Department of Transportation, and the City's Department of Planning. In addition, numerous racial justice advocates, foundation representatives, historians, and researchers have expressed interest in joining the task force.

Having laid a strong foundation for robust efforts to meet all aspects of the task force's mission, and with a goal of completing the work by June 2026, the task force will focus on the following efforts in the coming fiscal year:

1. Assess BPD's existing community engagement policies and procedures
2. Assess existing housing and employment policies and procedures
3. Review archival policies, procedures, and legal opinions that should be sunset
4. Review recommendations of the City's Charter Review Commission to assure equity
5. Join in collaborative "truth and reconciliation" conversations

### **BCPSS Student Case Management Task Force**

*Chair(s): Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success Director Dr. Debra Brooks*

The Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success is leading intensive case management to support high-risk youth in partnership with the Baltimore City Public School System, the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, the Baltimore City Health Department, and the Department of Juvenile Services. The goal of this strength-based model is to identify and track high-risk young people and amplify the strengths and resources that they and their families have available in their lives already while also bringing together the vast resources of the City of Baltimore to fill in any gaps. A young person considered high-risk can include being a victim of gun violence, a witness to gun violence or having a sibling, family member or household member who is a victim of gun violence.

Intensive case management supports include wraparound services that are responsive to their needs and range from reconnecting youth with the school system to behavioral health services to services that support the whole family such as utility and rental assistance. Through intensive case management, high-risk youth and their families can receive supports to help them find some relief and improve their quality of life while reducing conditions that increase individual and community risk for violence.

Since the reconvening of the VPTF, the Intensive Case Management group has been established and held a group orientation. An MOU has been created and signed to support the intensive case management work.

A large deliverable of this subgroup is the Safe Passage program, which helps to ensure that students get to and from school safely. Work associated with this initiative is as follows:

- Continuing to connect with several City Schools administrators, principals etc. to discuss Safe Passage
- Created a Safe Passage landing page on the Bmorechildren website
- Identified businesses that would like to participate as a Safe Passage partner
- Created signage for each business
- Continues to present at BPD Comstat and Mayor Scott's Youth Violence Stat
- Conducted several city-wide rides with City School Police to identify areas of need

- Created a communications plan to ensure the community and City Schools are aware of Safe Passage

## **Future Goals**

As the Violence Prevention Task Force looks ahead to 2024 and beyond, the body aims to establish a recurring monthly meeting cadence. Moving forward, the body will work to review the biennial update of the Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan (CVPP) and use it as a guiding plan for the body's future work. Implementation progress of the new goals established in the biennial CVPP update will be tracked by the VPTF body.

The co-chairs of the VPTF will also expand membership to the body throughout the 2024 calendar year by engaging additional agencies, community partners, and residents.