

**Testimony of Sheryl Goldstein,
Director of the Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice, Baltimore, Maryland
Before the Domestic Policy Subcommittee of the Oversight and Governmental Reform Committee
October 1, 2007
9:30 a.m.**

Introduction

Good morning. I appreciate the subcommittee's desire to help cities like Baltimore reduce violence and address the growing gang problem, and I thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Baltimore is a city with many strengths, but we also have some serious challenges – crime is perhaps the most serious. Gang culture and criminal activity are threats to the many law-abiding citizens of our city, and they create long-term challenges because gangs recruit young, and young people who commit crimes often spend their entire lives on the wrong side of the law. They don't finish school, their opportunities for employment are limited, and they stay in gangs until they go to prison or die violently on the street.

Preventing juvenile crime, combating gang activity and reducing youth violence in Baltimore City, requires a citywide effort including local, state and federal agencies, social service providers, community based organizations, faith-based groups, neighborhood associations, community leaders, residents and youth. City agencies must work together to address health, criminal justice, recreation, employment, and other socioeconomic issues confronting Baltimore residents. The Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice works to coordinate the efforts of City agencies, as well as build relationships with state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations and community groups to combat and prevent juvenile and gang related crime and violence.

The Problem

Youth involvement in gangs and violence is a growing concern. Gang members have been identified in each of the nine police districts and gang graffiti is seen in many neighborhoods in Baltimore. Police estimate that, as of September 2007, the City of Baltimore had 50 known criminal street gangs with over 1500 adult members, including over 800 Blood and 200 Crip members. In addition, Baltimore City School Police estimate that in city high schools there are over 60 gangs with approximately 550-600 members. In the middle and elementary schools it is estimated that there are an additional 600 members of gangs. There is a significant decrease in the total number of "known criminal street gangs" from last year. This decrease is a result of geographically based neighborhood gangs becoming more organized and joining "sets" of the nationally recognized gangs of the Bloods and Crips.

Juvenile crime and violence is also on the rise. In 2006, over 9000 juveniles were arrested in Baltimore. A third of these arrests were for drug offenses. Juveniles account for nearly twenty percent of all adult suspects charged with felony gun offenses this year. Even more troubling -- Baltimore City has experienced a 64% increase in juvenile shooting victims and shooting suspects.

The Strategy

Mayor Dixon has adopted a multi-faceted approach to combat gangs and youth violence. The strategy includes targeting violent offenders, gathering and using gang intelligence, getting illegal guns off the streets and preventing violence through targeted outreach, partnership and service delivery. It is the role of law enforcement and prosecution agencies to arrest and prosecute violent offenders, gang members involved in illegal activity and people who possess and use illegal guns.¹ While this enforcement focus is a critical component of Mayor Dixon's

strategy, law enforcement and prosecution agencies cannot solve the problem and youth crime, gang activity and violence alone. Therefore, Mayor Dixon's Administration supports gang and juvenile crime reduction through outreach, community partnership and providing opportunities to those who chose to take positive steps towards realizing their full potential.

The Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice collaborates with the Baltimore Police Department, the Health Department, the Department of Recreation & Parks, the Mayor's Office of Employment Development, the Family League of Baltimore City and other agencies and community groups to coordinate services and create a continuum of youth violence prevention and intervention programs. By working together, agencies and community based organizations provide a wide array of opportunities and services for youth – from interventions for those most at risk to positive opportunities for all youth, regardless of risk factors.

Outreach Initiatives

Mayor Dixon, through the Baltimore Health Department, has launched Operation Safe Streets, a community mobilization and outreach program designed to combat shootings and homicides. It replicates CeaseFire Chicago, a highly successful program created by the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The intervention targets at risk youth aged 14 to 25 through outreach and service connection and targets the community as a whole through a media campaign and community mobilization.

The program uses proven public health methods to create behavior change through repetitive prevention messages and concrete services that support and give credibility to the message. In its first year of operation in high violence communities in Chicago, CeaseFire achieved reductions in shootings of between 25% and 67%. Baltimore is funded to operate two Operation Safe Streets sites through fiscal year 2008. The first site, Living Classrooms, was

selected through a competitive process in April 2007 and the second site, COIL, was recently selected and will begin operations in October.

Baltimore is also partnering with grassroots organizations that are working on the ground to intervene with gang members. Through the Family League of Baltimore, the City is partnering with and has funded programs such as, Reclaiming Our Children & Community Project, Precision Youth Power Program, On Our Shoulders and New Vision Youth Services to intervene and provide other opportunities to gang involved youth. The Administration continues to develop partnerships with other community based and faith groups that can provide opportunities and alternatives.

Providing Services and Creating Opportunities

Providing services to build on existing assets and give ex-offenders, gang members and youth at risk the opportunities and tools they need to succeed is a central part of Baltimore City's vision. Job training, education, employment, housing, substance abuse treatment, mental health services and recreation will help individuals to realize their true potential and stop engaging in acts of violence. The Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice collaborates with the Baltimore Police Department, the Health Department, the Department of Recreation & Parks, the Mayor's Office of Employment Development, the Family League of Baltimore City and other agencies and community groups to coordinate services and create a continuum of youth violence prevention and intervention programs.

The Health Department's Office of Youth Violence Prevention administers multiple programs that provide at-risk youth in the juvenile justice system with alternatives to placement. Operation Safe Kids (OSK) is a youth violence prevention program that provides community-based case management and monitoring to juvenile offenders who are at high risk of becoming

victims or perpetrators of violence. The Baltimore City Health Department workers work closely with Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) case managers and other state and city agencies to reduce youth violence in the city by ensuring these young people have the tools they need to become productive adults.

Operation Safe Kids has reduced recidivism and improved academic and employment opportunities. Arrest data from 2005 for youth enrolled in OSK for at least one year show that compared to the year prior to program entry, total arrests dropped 32.9% in the first year of the program, arrests for drug crimes dropped 41.2%, and arrests for violent crimes dropped 44%. OSK youth are also connected to education and employment opportunities as a part of the program. While in OSK, 72.3% of youth not enrolled in school at admission were enrolled through the program, and 55% received at least one employment placement through OSK. Data analysis has revealed that every 10% increase in employment of participating youth is associated with a 20% drop in arrests.

Based on the success of OSK, the City recently launched Operation Safe Kids Court (OSK Court), a collaborative effort between the Office of Youth Violence Prevention, DJS, the Circuit Court, Baltimore Police, State's Attorney's Office, and the Office of the Public Defender. OSK Court is an intensive community based program that seeks to prevent out of home placement for youth on probation. Youth in the program receive the same services as OSK clients, but are subject to more extensive monitoring. A juvenile judge monitors progress and compliance with the program, in accordance with the OSK Consequences and Rewards Policy. OSK Court participants and their families are expected to comply with terms of the court order and conditions of the program. These may include monthly court reviews and other conditions as appropriate.

In October, the Health Department will begin to offer Multisystemic Therapy (MST) to 50 juvenile justice involved youth each year as an alternative to placement. MST is an evidence-based practice with a two-decade record of success that has been recognized by the Surgeon General, National Institutes on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health, and Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, and President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. It is an intensive family- and community-based treatment for youth presenting with serious emotional disturbance, including substance abuse problems, major conduct disorders, and other problems, who are at risk of out-of-home placement. The intervention assists patients to function in their natural settings in order to reduce rearrest, substance abuse, and out-of-home placements and improve family functioning in the long term. The typical length of treatment is 3 to 5 months and it is an alternative to out of home placement.

Failure to complete high school and unemployment are significant risk factors for youth. To best intervene with this high risk group, the Mayor's Office of Employment Development provides programs that engage young people in productive activities that promote their career development and build the skills they will need to succeed in the work place. The FUTURES program targets students most at risk of dropping out of school and provides them with mentoring and comprehensive support to keep them in school through graduation. Last year, the FUTURES program served 725 youth. Two full-scale Youth Opportunity Centers reconnect over 1000 youth each year who have dropped out of school to a broad menu of academic, personal growth and employment services. MOED also partners with the City school system's Alternative Options Network and run two schools, the Career Academy and the YO Academy, that give at risk and out of school youth the chance to earn their high school diploma or GED along with career skills. Additionally, over 5000 City teens are employed each

summer through MOED's YouthWorks summer jobs program where they learn job readiness and work place skills in a safe environment.

Young people who participated in MOED's programs benefited from it. Participants dropped out of school less often, attended class more frequently and graduated from high school at a higher rate than their school peers who did not enroll in the program. Female participants had babies less frequently than non-participants and, in fact, were 25% less likely to have a child than the comparison group. Participants who were 18 years old and above had a third fewer arrests and convictions for crimes and were half as likely to be arrested for a violent offense.

The Department of Recreation and Parks and The Family League of Baltimore City provide positive opportunities for young people to encourage them to stay on the right path. The Family League focuses on violence reduction through the funding, coordination, and monitoring of a continuum of youth development programs specifically intended to strengthen youth and family resiliency while reducing risk factors associated with violence and delinquency. Sponsored programs include primary prevention activities for all youth regardless of risk factors, early intervention services for youth with early at-risk behaviors, diversion services for youth who have already begun to exhibit problem behaviors, and intervention and treatment services for youth with a pattern of problem behavior.

The Department of Recreation & Parks offers Baltimore youth a range of recreational opportunities at recreation centers, sports leagues, and through targeted programming. The Department operates 47 recreation centers and 29 pools across the City. All programs incorporate an anti-violence curriculum that encourages youth to stay out of trouble and become involved in their communities. Additionally, at seven sites throughout the city, Recreation

Centers operate under extended hours on Friday nights (7 p.m. – 1 a.m.) providing teenagers with a positive environment for socializing with peers.

The Baltimore Police Department operates 18 Police Athletic League centers which provide positive opportunities for youth to stay out of trouble, works with young people who want to get out of gangs through its Get Out of the Game program, provides gang education through its GREAT program and holds informational forums about gangs. In addition, the Baltimore Police Department diverts appropriate juvenile offenders to Teen Court and the Community Conferencing Center as an alternative to the juvenile justice system.

The Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice works with these agencies, and others, to coordinate service delivery, develop new pathways to connect citizens to needed resources and create a full continuum of opportunities and alternatives to incarceration and placement. Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide testimony to the Committee on this important issue today.