



Department of Justice

**STATEMENT OF
NICHOLAS W. BROWN
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
CRIME, TERRORISM, AND HOMELAND SECURITY**

**FOR A HEARING ENTITLED
“REIMAGINING PUBLIC SAFETY IN THE COVID-19 ERA”**

PRESENTED

MARCH 8, 2022

**Statement of
Nicholas W. Brown
United States Attorney
Western District of Washington
U.S. Department of Justice**

**Before the House Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security**

**For a Hearing Entitled
“Reimagining Public Safety in the COVID-19 Era”
March 8, 2022**

Thank you, Chairwoman Jackson Lee, Ranking Member Biggs, and distinguished members of the Committee for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am pleased to be here to discuss the Department of Justice’s (Department) efforts to work together with communities to address violent crime. My name is Nick Brown. I began my career with the Department in 2007, where I served as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Western District of Washington’s (District) criminal division until 2013. I’m proud to be testifying before you now as the U.S. Attorney for the same District.

Addressing violent crime is one of the top priorities of the Department. Violence, particularly gun violence, is on the rise across our nation. The statistics are as disturbing in Washington, D.C. as they are in *my* Washington. To tackle this challenge, we must leverage the significant power of community relationships to reduce gun violence and violent crime. That is why the Department has highlighted Community Violence Intervention (CVI) programs as an important complementary tool to law enforcement efforts. These programs have been shown to reduce incidents of violence by targeting individuals who are most at-risk to commit or become the victims of violence with evidence-based and community-informed support.

My District spans two borders, from Canada all the way down to Oregon. While our largest city, Seattle, often commands much of the attention, the people we serve are in cities big and small, rural and urban. In my work as U.S. Attorney and throughout my career, I’ve had the opportunity to get to know federal, state, Tribal, and local law enforcement throughout our communities. The message I’ve received from law enforcement when it comes to violent crime has been consistent and clear across the state: They cannot solve the issue of violent crime alone.

Partnership between law enforcement and our communities is vital to making enduring change. And that’s why, in May 2021, the Department announced its Comprehensive Strategy for Reducing Violence. That strategy calls for active engagement with the communities and organizations that we serve through prevention and intervention strategies, including CVI programs. CVI programs employ the power of individuals and institutions within communities to support people most impacted by violence and help to prevent violence by connecting people with appropriate services and de-escalating conflicts. One evaluation of a Brooklyn-based CVI strategy done by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice found that gun injuries fell by 50 percent in the target neighborhood following program implementation.

Importantly, the Department does not engage CVI as a substitute for policing; we employ it as a complement to policing that recognizes the value of community and community-based partners in violent crime reduction efforts. Using a comprehensive approach to public safety, we are better able to address trends in the crime rates, which in turn allows us to better focus our resources.

In my District, we lean into community-based partnerships as much as possible. In our experience, community-centered, evidence-based programs often improve public safety and reduce violence by reaching broader audiences than the law enforcement community can do on its own. Many of the organizations, including our tribal partners, have developed alternatives to traditional prosecutions and have shown sustainable reductions in recidivism.

Let me give you a few specific examples of the work we're doing here in Washington State:

- We partner with a variety of community groups that are working to prevent violence—especially among our youth. These organizations help us identify the drivers of crime in our communities, which in turn informs how to best use the federal tools at our disposal. Much of the work in CVI centers on addressing and healing the generational trauma of poverty, childhood exposure to violence, lack of educational and employment opportunities, and racism. Our community partners identify those young people most at risk of being involved in gang and gun violence, and work on messaging to combat negative influences. But messaging alone is not enough; to be successful, outreach must be accompanied by an offer of services and support. This support often includes assistance with trauma counseling, housing, education, and employment.
- The Department has supported a recent partnership between the Kent Police Department, in King County, Washington, and a community organization by providing grant funding from the Department's Project Safe Neighborhoods Program. This partnership implemented "Night Walks" to provide a consistent presence at an intersection that experienced high rates of gun violence. That program—built on the recommendations of the community itself—resulted in a dramatic reduction in violent crime.
- My office has also supported grant funding for, and collaborated with, a Seattle-based community organization that provides on-the-ground support, expertise, and resources to prevent, intervene in, and de-escalate gun violence. They respond to shooting incidents to serve as de-escalation agents at the scene, in hospitals, and in gun violence hot spots to calm tensions that may lead to further harm. They also provide or connect individuals and families directly impacted by gun violence with mentoring, emotional support for post-traumatic stress, medical follow-up, housing, substance use treatment, job opportunities, and other support to help ensure community safety. As a result of their participation in the program, young people have started their own businesses, gained steady employment, graduated from high school, attended college, reunified their families, and become credible messengers and mentors for other young people who are at risk of engaging in gang violence.

Examples like these demonstrate that supporting community members in healing their own communities does not supplant the need for law enforcement. Instead, it proactively helps law

enforcement do their jobs better. The root causes of violence run deep, and we cannot expect our officers to serve as mental health practitioners, housing advocates, or substance abuse counselors—although they often do play these roles. Through leveraging the expertise of community partners, law enforcement officers can focus on their public safety roles within our communities without these additional strains on their resources.

CVI initiatives also recognize that we cannot simply arrest and incarcerate our way out of crime. Ending the cycle of violence means committing to evidence-based prevention, intervention, rehabilitation, and reentry. Our District has engaged with various community-based partners focused on some of these areas. For example, with our support and engagement, a successful reentry program from the Washington State Women’s prison is being replicated in our federal detention center. This program is based on the question: “If there was something someone could have said or done that would have changed the path that led you here, what would it have been?” That concept sparks an intensive process by which persons who are incarcerated help map out their own successful reentry into the community. And now, we are bringing that same model to women involved in our federal system.

Many state and local law enforcement entities across the nation are also using Department funding to support community policing and innovative CVI initiatives. In our District, for example, this funding has been used to develop apps for communicating with community members, training officers on procedural justice and community policing, and exploring ways to de-escalate difficult encounters. For Fiscal Year 2021, the Department—through components such as the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS)—awarded grants totaling nearly \$444 million to support a wide range of violence reduction efforts, including community-based violence intervention and prevention strategies, youth and school violence prevention programs, and evidence-based police and prosecution practices across the country.¹ Some examples include:

- *COPS Hiring Program (CHP)*: A \$156 million grant program to support the hiring of career law enforcement officers to increase an agency’s community policing capacity and crime prevention efforts, which, in 2021, prioritized funding for agencies that partner with community organizations to support CVI strategies.
- *Community Policing Development Microgrants Program*: A \$3 million grant program that supports innovative community policing strategies, including development and enhancement programs that engage the community in violence reduction efforts, such as street outreach, violence interrupters, hospital-based intervention, and other programs that provide wraparound services to communities.
- *School Violence Prevention Program*: A grant program totaling over \$125 million to help institute safety measures in and around primary and secondary schools, support school violence prevention efforts, provide training to school personnel and students, and implement evidence-based threat assessments.

¹ <https://bja.ojp.gov/news/nearly-444-million-awarded-support-violence-intervention-efforts>

- *Comprehensive Youth Violence Prevention and Reductions Programs*: A \$14 million grant program that provides funding for programs that prevent and reduce youth violence.
- *Smart Policing Program*: A \$6.4 million grant program to fund training and technical assistance for law enforcement to use data and technology to respond to crime.
- *Second Chance Act Community-Based Reentry Program*: The Department issued guidance to clarify that community-based organizations with CVI proposals are eligible for \$12.75 million in funds under this program.
- *Project Safe Neighborhoods Program*: A \$20 million grant program that brings together federal, state, local, and Tribal law enforcement and community-based partners to identify the most pressing violent crime problems in a community and develop comprehensive solutions to address them. For example, in 2021, our District sought funding to build the capacity of a South King County organization that engages underprivileged youth and young adults in areas of high gun and gang violence as identified by local police agencies and attorney’s offices. The organization promotes holistic development through athletics and other prosocial activities that offer positive, easily accessible alternatives to criminal behavior.
- *Strategies to Support Children Exposed to Violence Program*: An \$8 million grant program that provides funding, training, and assistance to communities to address children’s exposure to violence and prevent gun violence.
- *Hospital-Based Victim Services Program*: A \$2 million grant program to fund programs that link the victim services field and medical facilities.
- *Center for Cultural Responsive Victim Services Program*: A \$3 million grant program to launch a national resource to improve trauma-informed, victim-centered services in communities of color.
- *Victims of Crime Act Funding (VOCA)*: The Department disseminated guidance in September 2021 to clarify that states may use their allocations from annual VOCA funding—which in Fiscal Year 2021 was over \$1 billion—for CVI efforts and may provide training and technical assistance on CVI to grantees and subgrantees.

The Department has made, and will continue to make, these important investments to help communities and law enforcement work together to develop innovative approaches to help those at the highest risk of engaging in, or becoming victims of, violence. That’s why the President’s FY 2022 budget called for a \$200 million investment in CVI strategies through appropriations that would flow through the Department and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The Department is already working closely with HHS to plan for administering these funds in anticipation of appropriations. These funds, if made available, will greatly enhance the capacity of communities across the nation to prevent and reduce violence. By supporting community-based

violence intervention strategies, in alignment and coordination with local and federal law enforcement, these funds will save lives and promote safer and healthier communities.

Thank you again, for the time and attention of this Committee on this crucial issue. I look forward to answering your questions and continuing working with you.