

February 17, 2023

To: Mayor Ed Gainey

Re: Increasing Law Enforcement Patrols Downtown



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Dear Mayor Gainey,

I am writing to you to express the concerns of the ACLU of Pennsylvania about the city's proposal to expand policing in downtown Pittsburgh. According to a recent article, the city plans to increase the number of police in downtown Pittsburgh, including by using county police to patrol downtown. While the effort may be to address concerns that allegedly unruly behavior of youth could drive away visitors or tenants from downtown Pittsburgh, we urge you to look to alternatives for addressing youth misbehavior or violence, such as investing in safe locations for youth to gather after school.¹

City council recently voted to explore the creation of 24-hour youth support centers. We hope that you will follow the council's lead in considering ways to support our youth that benefit their physical, emotional, and social well-being and do not involve law enforcement and the criminal legal system. More police will only heighten the disparities between the number of Black youth stopped, arrested, and cited by city police officers compared to white youth.

Increasing law enforcement will do little to address the root of the behavior. Research has found that over-policing low-level offenses in communities of color is not only ineffective at reducing violent crime but can also lead to youth feeling increased rates of anxiety and depression, withdrawing from civic life, dropping out of school, and experiencing lasting distrust of police systems, as happened in New York City with "stop and frisk" practices.²

Further, increasing policing to address incidents of violence has been shown to have little effect and perpetuates or exacerbates racial inequities. Sean Campbell, a researcher at Columbia University, found that "Black people account for a disproportionate amount of police actions across the board, by the Pittsburgh Police Department's own annual report. Even though the city is only 23% Black, Black people account for nearly two thirds of all arrests."³

¹ Felton, J. (2023). Allegheny County Police assisting Pittsburgh officers in patrolling Downtown. *Trib Live*. <https://triblive.com/local/allegheny-county-police-assisting-pittsburgh-officers-in-patrolling-downtown/>

² Badger, Emily. (2020). The Lasting Effects of Stop-and-Frisk in Bloomberg's New York. *The New York Times*.

³ 2021 Statistical Report. Available at:

https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/18173_2021_Annual_Report_Final.pdf

When over 80% of youth (under 18) arrested are Black, increasing police presence downtown at times when our youth are going to or returning from school will likely further exacerbate these disparities while doing little to nothing to address concerns with behavior or violence.

Studies have shown that funding community violence interruption programs in Chicago,^{4,5} New York,^{6,7} and Philadelphia⁸ reduced violence in those cities. Funding for other community-based programs, such as increasing summer employment opportunities, counseling availability, and wraparound services for youth living in disinvested areas, has also helped to reduce violence. However, even more work must be done in addition to those programs to address the roots of violence, as these efforts “are community interventions to treat the symptoms of violence, but not to transform the neighborhood conditions that create it.”⁹

Rather than relying on law enforcement or the criminal legal system to address youth misbehavior or incidents of violence, we call on the city to invest in non-carceral, non-punitive strategies that have been proven to work. A comprehensive report by The Brookings Institution provides guidance on how to address violence in our community.¹⁰ It analyzes the “four key dimensions of community well-being” that “can provide promising non-carceral alternatives for community safety,” and, if followed, could serve as a model for Pittsburgh.

This work should be done in collaboration with youth and the organizations that serve them across the city. Youth participation in community-based programs or after-school activities has been shown to reduce the likelihood of criminal behavior and are a better investment of city funds than increasing law enforcement patrols in downtown Pittsburgh.

Sincerely,

Ghadah Makoshi, Community Advocate, ACLU-PA

⁴ Skogan WG, Hartnett SM, Bump N, Dubois J. Evaluation of CeaseFire-Chicago. Northwestern University report to the National Institute of Justice. March 2008. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/227181.pdf>

⁵ Henry DB, Knoblauch S, Sigurvinsdottir R. The Effect of Intensive CeaseFire Intervention on Crime in Four Chicago Police Beats: Quantitative Assessment. University of Chicago report to the McCormick Foundation, September 2014. https://cvg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/McCormick_CeaseFire_Quantitative_Report_091114.pdf

⁶ Delgado SA, Alsabahi L, Wolff K, Alexander N, Cobar P, Butts JA. Evaluation of Cure Violence in the South Bronx and East New York, Brooklyn. Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay School of Criminal Justice, City University of New York. October 2017. <https://johnjayrec.nyc/2017/10/02/cvinsobronxeastny/>

⁷ Butts JA, Wolff KT, Misshula E, Delgado SA. Effectiveness of the Cure Violence Model in New York City. John Jay School of Criminal Justice, City University of New York. CUNY Academic Works. 2015. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1472&context=jj_pubs

⁸ Roman CG, Klein H, Wolff KT, Bellamy MD, Reeves K. Philadelphia CeaseFire: Findings from the Impact Evaluation. Temple University, January 2017. https://cvg.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SummaryofPhilaCeaseFireFindingsFormatted_Jan2017.pdf

⁹ South, E. (2021). To Combat Gun Violence, Clean up the Neighborhood. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/08/opinion/gun-violence-biden-philadelphia.html>

¹⁰ Love, H., (2021). Want to Reduce Violence? Invest in Place. *The Brookings Institution*. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/want-to-reduce-violence-invest-in-place/>