

*City of Alexandria, Virginia (DRAFT)*

**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: JUNE X, 2022

TO: MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

CC: CITY MANAGER JIM PARAJON

FROM: COUNCILWOMAN ALYIA GASKINS AND MAYOR JUSTIN WILSON

SUBJECT: YOUTH SAFETY AND RESILIENCY

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Alexandria's youth are the heart of our community. When they thrive, our city thrives. Ensuring their physical and emotional well-being is our greatest responsibilities as a community and as a municipal government.

In the aftermath of a spate of recent violence, including the tragic death of Luis Mejia Hernandez on May 24<sup>th</sup>, it is clear that we must do more to promote youth safety and resilience, prevent youth violence before it occurs, and respond more effectively when we fail to prevent violence.

There are numerous City and State departments, non-profits and community organizations that serve youth in our City. No single agency or sector alone is solely responsible. Our youth need all of these entities to collaborate as partners with shared goals and to mobilize all available resources.

The City is uniquely positioned to pull together public agencies, local businesses, philanthropy, faith- and community-based partners, parents, youth, and interested community members to reduce youth violence and improve outcomes for our youth and neighborhoods.

Our Children & Youth Master Plan<sup>1</sup> and the successor Children and Youth Community Plan<sup>2</sup> provides us with a vision and actions to ensure all young people are safe, feel valued, and have the supports they need to thrive. These plans provide a critical foundation for the development of a comprehensive, holistic youth safety and preventive plan that prioritizes prevention, intervention, and enforcement.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://media.alexandriava.gov/docs-archives/dchs/childrenfamily/youthtopics/alexandriachildrenyouthmasterplan2014.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://media.alexandriava.gov/docs-archives/dchs/childrenfamily/cymp2025.pdf>

In the short-term the Alexandria Police Department will continue its work to investigate recent acts of violence and provide appropriate security interventions to make future acts of violence less likely.

To sustainably support the resiliency of our youth and prevent violence, we need to listen as much as we talk. We must engage a diverse range of stakeholders to listen to the experiences of our young people and center their voices, learn what is at the root of youth trauma and violence, and act. With this rigorous engagement, we can design and refine the systems and reforms required to:

- Address youth trauma and mental health
- Coordinate across sectors to identify challenges, needs, and opportunities
- Develop sustainable strategies to align services and existing initiatives
- Identify metrics and transparent processes to hold ourselves accountable
- Target investments at identified gaps
- Prioritize equity

As we move forward, we are proposing we:

## **LISTEN**

- Partner with youth, ACT's Alexandria Youth Council and other youth leadership entities (e.g., peer advisors, peer advocates, etc.) to host a youth safety and violence prevention summit
  - **GOAL:**
    - Facilitate an opportunity for youth to share their concerns that is designed by them and for them
    - Articulate a common vision of success

## **LEARN**

- Convene a special task force with representatives of the youth-serving agencies (e.g., City and School Staff Group, Youth Services Coordinating Council, etc.) to align the themes from the summit into a multi-year plan of actions
  - **GOAL:**
    - Develop a framework and protocol for an effective response to youth safety, conflict and violence
    - Review existing data, programs and policies to better understand what is being done, who is doing it, and impact
    - Create a citywide, multi-year plan with clear objectives, activities, agency roles and contributions, and performance metrics
- Review the recommendations of the School Law Enforcement Partnership (SLEP) Advisory Group
  - **GOAL:**
    - Incorporate into the citywide plan and direct resources to support this effort

## ACT

- Explore opportunities to use ARPA funds or other resources to implement the plan
  - **GOAL:** Allocate resources to implement plan recommendations
- Convene representatives from the Children, Youth and Families Collaborative, the Gang Prevention Taskforce, the Public Health Advisory Commission, the Mayor's Campaign on Bullying, and other stakeholders (e.g., public agencies, youth, parents, etc.) to monitor plan implementation
  - **GOAL:**
    - Facilitate opportunities for continued community engagement
    - Work with the community to review and update over time

Given the urgency of these issues, it is the expectation that the summit will take place by the end of July and the draft plan come before Council in September.

Cc: TBD