



Gun Violence Prevention Task Force Preliminary Report

**Presented to County Executive Steuart Pittman
December 19, 2019**

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Residents of Anne Arundel County,

I wish to thank County Executive Pittman for the opportunity to serve as Chair of the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force. In April 2019, Mr. Pittman issued an Executive Order creating the task force.

During our inaugural task force meeting, Mr. Pittman challenged us to think differently in our search for creative ways to address gun violence in the county. The members of the task force took their work very seriously, and I thank them for their time, talent and contributions.

To serve the county in this capacity has been a privilege and a personal calling for me. In 2016, I received the news that any parent dreads: my firstborn son, Charles Carroll Jr., had been shot; he would die in the hospital hours later.

My entire life changed in that instant, and I've been on a mission ever since to channel my personal grief into the larger purpose of preventing the kind of violence that had claimed the life of my son.

Charles Jr. was a kind and giving soul with a great sense of humor. I miss him everyday. Gun violence has devastated too many families in our county. As a member of the clergy, I have presided over the funerals of 16 young homicide victims since 2014.

As the task force learned about methods used throughout the country, I have grown personally over the last seven months. This has been an eye opening experience.

The preliminary Gun Violence Prevention Task Force Report briefly summarizes the work we began in May 2019. Our final comprehensive report will be presented in Spring 2020. On behalf of the task force Vice Chairs Andrea Chamblee, Maria Hiaasen, and the entire membership, we hope you find this information helpful.

We also hope you will contribute your energy in positive ways during the upcoming year to the prevention of gun violence. Because that's the only way we'll make Anne Arundel County truly *The Best Place For All*, where everyone can reach their fullest potential.

Sincerely,

Bishop Charles E. Carroll

SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM

“Another year is coming to an end, and the shootings continue.”

--Capital Gazette Editorial Board, November 20, 2019

Anne Arundel County is the fifth largest county in Maryland geographically, with 415 square miles and more than a half million residents. For most people, most of the time, the county is a wonderful and safe place to live.

Still, the state Office of the Medical Examiner reported 209 deaths in Anne Arundel from guns between the years 2013 to 2017. The majority of those deaths (67 percent) were ruled suicides, 30 percent were homicides, two percent were accidental and one percent were law enforcement involved.

More than half the homicide victims were African American males -- 56 percent of the countywide total -- with the largest number occurring in the most populated communities of Brooklyn Park, Glen Burnie and Annapolis.

On June 28, 2018, the lives of five newspaper workers were added to the homicide statistics: Gerald Fischman, Rob Hiaasen, John McNamara, Rebecca Smith and Wendi Winters. They were murdered during a shooting spree in the newsroom of the Capital Gazette in Annapolis.

Every part of our county has been impacted by gun violence, either indirectly or directly, even our youngest schoolchildren. Anne Arundel County Public Schools routinely take time out of their school day to practice a variety of emergency drills with students, including “intruder in the building drills,” to simulate situations in which someone who doesn’t belong in a school building has gained access.

Over the last several decades, a growing number of public health organizations, academic researchers, and medical groups such as the National Medical Association, the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians and the American Academy of Pediatrics have deemed gun violence as a major threat to public health (Jones et al. 2018).

Within this context, beginning in May 2019, the Anne Arundel Gun Violence Prevention Task Force (GVPTF) undertook an examination of the universe of gun violence issues and prevention strategies through the lens of public health. We dismissed framing our discussions as yet another round of fighting between advocacy groups for gun control or gun rights.

Over the past decade, the intersection of these two sides of the argument has resulted in divisive and often angry rhetoric, with no sense of purpose toward shared goals.

Our goal was to move beyond these traditional battle lines. As much as possible, we promoted a civil and constructive dialogue to produce a deeper and unifying narrative

about the health and wellbeing of the county, and how its system of public health might be deployed to tackle some of the most pressing gun violence issues.

Senseless mass shootings are almost commonplace today. While attracting widespread news coverage when they occur, mass shootings account for only a small percentage of firearm-related deaths. But they are occurring more frequently and are affecting the character of public life in America.

In 2018 in the United States, there were 340 mass shootings, killing 373 people and injuring another 1,346 (APHA Gun Violence Fact Sheet). From 2011 to 2015, a total of 21,241 children died from firearm-related injuries (Goyal et al. 2018).

The CDC reports that nationally from 2015 to 2016 firearm homicide claimed the lives of 27,394 people and another 44,955 individuals died from firearm suicide. These numbers do not include the 200,000 people injured by a firearm during the same timeframe. Suicide has become the second leading cause of death among 15 to 24 year olds, with the majority of suicides resulting from the use of firearms. Black men are 14 times more likely to die of firearm homicide than white men (Ulrich 2019).

These alarming national trends are generally present in Anne Arundel County, particularly the homicide rate for African American men.

In fact, the local community of Robinwood became so concerned about the level of violence in 2007 that residents invited a triple Grammy Award winning rap artist, Grandmaster Mele Mel and songwriter-singer, Delray, who grew up in Robinwood, to a special meeting to address the situation.

Using their high credibility with young people in the community, the celebrities implored residents to proactively end the violence by taking steps to create its own solutions to the problem. The Capital Gazette's own Wendi Winters covered that meeting (Gazette 2007).

Despite the intervening years, communities like Robinwood have continued to suffer disproportionately from gun violence. Physicians and public health providers who serve African American communities continue to face seemingly insurmountable causes and effects of violence.

According to the American Public Health Association, gun violence is a leading cause of premature death in the United States. The APHA Gun Violence Fact Sheet states:

- Gun violence affects people of all ages and races in the U.S., but has a disproportionate impact on young adults, males and racial/ethnic minorities. The burden of gun violence in the United States vastly outpaces that in comparable countries.
- Guns are a weapon of choice for mass homicides and suicides.
- About 60 percent of all firearm deaths are suicide.

- Gun violence cost the U.S. \$229 billion in 2015, or an average of \$700 per gun in America.

The policy recommendations in this task force report reflect the latest studies and research by public health experts and thought leaders on gun violence, as well as commonsense guidance from gun owners, gun safety experts and survivors of gun violence.

The recommendations build on, strengthen and expand current best practices available in Anne Arundel County and elsewhere. In developing its recommendations, the task force adopted a public health approach that:

- Uses data from law enforcement, EMS, hospitals, the state health information exchange, the Centers for Disease Control and other local, state and federal sources to define the scope of the problem and understand the causes of gun violence;
- Identifies factors that increase the risk of gun violence (e.g. depression) and those that protect against gun violence (e.g. crisis intervention);
- Develops, implements and evaluates the use of interventions, screenings, education tools and legislation to decrease risk factors and increase protective factors;
- Implements widespread adoption of successful strategies.

As part of the public health approach, our methods:

- Reflect best practices from other jurisdictions;
- Recognize the importance of collaborative public input from gun violence victims, public health professionals, firearm safety experts, health care providers, academic researchers, elected officials, gun owners and members of the general public.

Recommendations That Address Gun Violence Through a Public Health Lens

The task force didn't restrain itself to recommendations based on the availability of county resources. We know that many will require the formation of new partnerships, funding strategies and additional resources that currently do not exist. We may even discover that additional recommendations are needed.

Throughout the process leading to this report, we recognized the importance of gathering public comment to inform our process. We received 26 written comments and heard a broad range of perspectives from 34 speakers. During monthly meetings at the Anne Arundel Medical Center, the full task force heard presentations, asked questions, recorded public comments and voted on next steps.

The following statements represent the recommendations of GVPTF and the work of its six subcommittees: Behavioral Health, Data-County Stats, Laws-Legal, Public Education and Messaging, Victim Services and Youth-Schools. They are not organized by priority in this report.

Intervene Before Gun Violence Occurs

- Officially declare gun violence a public health crisis in the county.
- Establish and coordinate an extensive network with schools, community based and faith-based organizations, and public institutions such as law enforcement departments, public health departments and academic institutions to work collaboratively in the reduction of gun violence.
- Develop and implement a coordinated plan for primary care and emergency room providers to screen for gun safety.
- Participate as a county in the national Gun Safety Consortium to encourage gun manufacturers to produce guns with safety features.
- Advocate for 100 percent criminal background checks for all firearms sales.
- Support national testing for knowledge and proficiency in gun use prior to purchase.
- Add additional Crisis Intervention Teams to the County's Crisis Response System to expand the reach to schools.

- Identify schools and communities with the highest rates of violence and bullying and expand/implement evidence-based programs that have demonstrated reductions in violent behavior.
- Improve mental health and decrease risk behaviors among adolescents by promoting increased sleep through healthy school start times.
- Invest in violence prevention and interruption programs that model best practices such as using trusted and credible individuals from within the community (who may be former offenders) to interrupt violence before it escalates into gun violence.
- Partner gun sellers with suicide prevention organizations, domestic violence prevention organizations and gun safety organizations so that life-saving resources are available at the point of sale.

Expand Community Outreach, Communications and Training

- Develop a broad range of education content about prevention issues, including: Extreme Risk Protection Orders (commonly known as red flag laws), safe gun storage, gun hand-in options, county/city gun violence data and student safety resources.
- Promote firearm safety courses and create public health messaging campaigns for gun owners and non-gun owners alike, including health professionals.
- Direct law enforcement agencies to deploy public awareness education and messaging on how to invoke the red flag law.
- Develop programs to assure that guns confiscated through red flag laws and other methods be returned to the owner after conditions are satisfactorily met.
- Promote mental health first aid training and education throughout the county to the general public and to individuals with behavioral health conditions, as well as other high-risk groups.
- Hold public forums in combination with education initiatives on gun violence prevention measures.

- Create a strategic communications plan for the deployment of gun violence prevention messages to the public, including the development of a communications and public outreach calendar.
- Collect photos and testimonials from survivors for social media campaigns that educate the public on different aspects of gun violence such as mass shootings, child access prevention, suicide prevention, urban gun violence and domestic violence.
- Develop a comprehensive resource guide listing services available to victims of gun violence modeled on successful outreach strategies such as the community outreach postcard and the community resource guide template developed by Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America.
- Create a Victim Services Response Team (modeled after Crisis Intervention) utilizing wraparound services that include access to government, faith-based and community resources.
- Compile public outreach lists of community associations, county government contact lists and economic development resources that are used to share and disseminate information.
- Create a video/series about gun violence prevention issues and use as Public Service Announcements on Anne Arundel Public TV, in schools and on social media channels.
- Create pre-packaged content (text and graphics) on priority topics that can be easily shared in community newsletters and on social media.
- Create a “train the trainer” speakers’ bureau program.
- Use a central web page/website to store materials and content.

Improve Data and Governance

- Improve procedures for student reporting and handling of incidents affecting student safety and emotional well-being.
- Establish a county-wide consortium to address the role of racial and economic disparities in gun violence. This effort should develop and implement specific

recommendations around: 1) Police resources; 2) Gun safety and 3) Community outreach (e.g. gang resistance education, specific programs for at-risk youth),

- Aggregate and report gun-related deaths and injuries to understand the impact of gun-related deaths and injuries from a public health perspective.
- Establish a centralized data repository to streamline interagency collaboration and facilitate the sharing of data between law enforcement agencies and gun violence prevention stakeholders.
- Establish additional metrics for the creation of evaluation plans measuring the effectiveness of countywide strategies to prevent gun violence.
- Ensure that the county's emergency operations plan is well coordinated with all health and human service departments.
- Reconsider the size and composition of the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force to make it more effective in assisting with implementation and oversight of the recommendations.
- Task a separate government-based workgroup to manage implementation and report to the full task force.

Support Gun Safety Measures at Every Level of Government

- Support local Anne Arundel County legislation to require reporting lost or stolen guns within 48 hours in the county. The current state requirement is 72 hours.
- Support local Anne Arundel County legislation to limit access to firearms by minors by requiring unattended firearms to be secured with a child safety lock.
- Support statewide legislation to accomplish the following:
 - Require buyers of rifles and shotguns to have a qualifying license and be subject to a background check prior to purchase;
 - Restrict firearm access for those convicted of alcohol-related offenses;
 - Restrict firearm access for those charged with or convicted of intimate partner violence and develop a process for these individuals to surrender their firearms.

Conclusion

This report is intended as a preliminary overview of strategies for gun violence prevention in the county. Our work has just begun. A workgroup will be convened to consider which recommendations to implement in the short-term and which will require additional resources.

It is important to note that a vast amount of additional research and work product by the task force is omitted here but will be included in the final report due Spring 2020. That report will feature more lengthy discussions of gun violence as a public health crisis, as well as additional task force recommendations, statistics and background information.

If we are to truly make Anne Arundel County The Best Place For All, then we must move past simply acknowledging the seriousness of the issue. The situation demands our immediate attention. Every segment of the community, both inside and outside government, must become engaged in the prevention and treatment of gun violence if we're to succeed. The way forward must include a multi-pronged approach that addresses the full range of social determinants affecting public health.

References

The following sources extend beyond those cited specifically in this preliminary report. Included here is a partial list of additional sources that will be used in the final Spring 2020 report.

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Gun Violence Prevention Task Force Members

Bishop Charles Carroll	Alba Reyes	Dr. Nilesh Kalyanaraman
Andrea Chamblee	Elizabeth Ruddy	Rhonda Pindell Charles
Maria Hiaasen	Jennifer Sowers	Allison Pickard
Jackie Allsup	Sgt. James Spearman	Jennifer Purcell
Lt. Brian Andre	Dawn Stoltzfus	Kevin Simmons
Elizabeth Banach	Lt. Steven Thomas	Pete Smith
Bob Bates	Sue Ward	Gregory J. Swain
Jamie Benoit	Tim Altomare	Nathan Volke
Mackenzie Boughey	J. Sandy Bartlett	Trisha Wolford
Stacy Korbela	Pam Beidle	
Iris Krasnow	Melissa Ellis	
Dr. David Moller	Anne Colt Leitess	
Chris Moore	Adrienne J. Mickler	