

# A PROPOSAL FOR A COMPREHENSIVE AND COORDINATED RESPONSE TO GANG AND YOUTH VIOLENCE

(March 31, 2009)

## Introduction

Over the past several decades, **three strategies have typified local governments' responses to gang and youth violence: suppression, intervention and prevention.** Suppression strategies typically involve specialized police and prosecution gang units that target the illegal behavior of active gangs and gang members with targeted and aggressive law enforcement tactics. Intervention efforts also focus on active gangs and their members, frequently in conjunction with suppression strategies and usually through outreach, corrections and social services. Prevention strategies generally focus on youth, families and communities at risk of becoming involved in gangs (e.g., siblings of active gang members) with programs such as mental health and addiction treatment, education services, and job, life skills and employment training.

A substantial body of rigorous empirical research and practical street-level experience now confirms **what works and what doesn't work** with regard to these three strategies:<sup>1</sup>

- Suppression strategies are critical to interrupting cycles of gang violence and retaliation and responding to violent incidents by apprehending and prosecuting perpetrators. However, with the exception of incapacitating violent offenders through lengthy state and federal prison sentences, **suppression strategies alone don't work to significantly reduce gang activity or youth violence over the long run.** To achieve such reductions over time, suppression strategies must be coordinated with intervention strategies like community outreach and correctional supervision and prevention strategies that focus on youth at risk of joining gangs.
- Local efforts to reduce gang and youth violence have generally been disappointing because they have emphasized **short-term tactics at the expense of long-term strategies** by focusing primarily on the latest neighborhood "hot spots" and gang rivalries, for example, rather than measurable outcomes with statistical significance such as violent crime rates in affected communities measured over substantial periods of time.
- Successful efforts to reduce gang and youth violence adopt a **comprehensive, three-pronged approach that coordinates suppression, intervention and prevention strategies** in pursuit of common, well-defined, long-term goals and outcomes.
- The most effective efforts have also incorporated the insights of **public health professionals and epidemiological analysis** in strategic

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the "Selected References" at the end of this proposal.

planning and development processes as part of a comprehensive, three pronged approach.

- Efforts to reduce gang and youth violence have been unsuccessful without **the support of affected communities** through their meaningful participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of gang and violence reduction strategies, thereby ensuring that these strategies are culturally appropriate and address problems of real concern to the affected communities.
- Most local efforts to reduce gang and youth violence are unsuccessful in achieving measurable, long-term results due to the lack of **a formal organizational structure**, which ensures
  - a proper balance and coordination among suppression, intervention and prevention strategies,
  - strategies and operations that focus on common goals and outcomes,
  - participating agencies and community organizations are held accountable for achieving common goals and outcomes,
  - meaningful participation by the affected communities and stakeholders and
  - sustainable efforts that persist in addressing gang and youth violence on a long-term basis, rather than tactical responses that are intermittent and temporary.

### **A Proposal**

This proposal is based upon (1) the foregoing empirical research and practical experience, (2) a history of balanced, comprehensive and community-based approaches to public safety by Multnomah County and cities in the County, (3) the many accomplishments of Multnomah County's Local Public Safety Coordinating Council (LPSCC) and (4) the opportunities for coordination and collaboration presented by the co-chairmanship of LPSCC by Portland City Commissioner Dan Saltzmann and Multnomah County Chair Ted Wheeler. Accordingly, **efforts to reduce gang and youth violence in Multnomah County should include the following components:**

- **A comprehensive, three-pronged approach** that balances and coordinates suppression, intervention and prevention efforts by city and county agencies in Multnomah County;
- **Policy and planning guidance and oversight of these efforts by LPSCC** through a Working Group established by the Council and made up of representatives of participating agencies, affected communities and key stakeholder organizations;
- **A partnership between LPSCC's Working Group and the Coalition of Communities of Color** to ensure (a) the support of affected communities, (b) coordination and balance among suppression, intervention and

prevention strategies and (c) the development of strategies, polices and operations that are culturally appropriate and that address problems of real concern to those communities;

### **Next Steps**

- 1. At LPSCC's April 7, 2009 meeting, present this proposal for discussion and approval** by the Council, propose LPSCC members to co-chair the Working Group and request expressions of interest in participating on the Working Group from LPSCC members and stakeholders.
- 2. Convene representatives of the Coalition of Communities of Color** as soon as possible to consider participation in a partnership with LPSCC.
- 3. At LPSCC's May 5, 2009 meeting, announce the membership of the Working Group and confirm the partnership between the Working Group with the Coalition of Communities of Color.**
- 4. On or about May 15, 2009, convene the first meeting of this partnership** to begin identifying the most effective continuum of gang services and strategies and a Strategic Plan to (a) coordinate suppression, intervention and prevention strategies, (b) establish goals and measurable outcomes and (c) select the communities in the County subject to the Strategic Plan.
- 5. Submit the Strategic Plan for review and approval by LPSCC at its June 2, 2009 meeting.**

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