

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE REFORM

Room 400, City Hall  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Monday, January 29, 2018  
10:20 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.  
COUNCILMAN KENYATTA JOHNSON  
KEVIN BETHEL, Philadelphia Police  
Department (retired)  
KEIR BRADFORD-GREY, ESQUIRE, Defenders  
Association  
WILFREDO ROJAS, Office of Community  
Justice and Outreach (retired)  
JULIE WERTHEIMER, Managing Director's  
Office  
CLAIRE SHUBIK-RICHARDS, Pennsylvania  
Prison Society  
LAWRENCE KRASNER, District Attorney  
JUDGE JAMES DeLEON, Municipal Court  
DEAN JOHN HOLLWAY, ESQUIRE, Quattrone  
Center for the Fair Administration  
of Justice at Penn Law

RESOLUTION 160101 - Resolution appointing  
members to the "Special Committee on Criminal  
Justice Reform," who will conduct public  
hearings examining the Philadelphia criminal  
justice system for the impact of current  
policies...

Special Committee on Criminal Justice Reform  
January 29, 2018

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2 COUNCILMAN JONES: Ladies and  
3 gentlemen, good morning. For some of  
4 you, happy new year. I haven't seen you.  
5 We hope that 2018 will be a productive  
6 year for justice reform, and I want to  
7 welcome everyone into Chambers this  
8 morning.

9 Would the Clerk please read the  
10 title of the resolution.

11 THE CLERK: Resolution No.  
12 160101, a resolution appointing members  
13 to the "Special Committee on Criminal  
14 Justice Reform," who will conduct public  
15 hearings examining the Philadelphia  
16 criminal justice system for the impact of  
17 current policies, and offer recommended  
18 strategies for reform that are in the  
19 best interest of public safety and the  
20 public good.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,  
22 Ms. Williams.

23 I just wanted to give brief  
24 comments, and I'll make that offer to  
25 both my Co-Chairs and the new members of

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2 our Committee welcoming them, putting  
3 forth their time and their talents to  
4 this worthwhile cause.

5 We're also at some -- oh, there  
6 he is. I was getting ready to announce  
7 that you were a part of it and you came  
8 in. You have to wear a bell, because you  
9 came in stealth.

10 Over the weekend, I took a look  
11 at the actual figure of the justice  
12 statue. It's a female, with a sword in  
13 one hand and the scales of justice in the  
14 other. In some renditions of that  
15 statue, she has a blindfold on. In other  
16 renditions of that statue, she does not.  
17 And I pondered that for a while trying to  
18 figure out why, and when I researched  
19 further -- and thank God for the  
20 Internet -- some renditions go back to  
21 Britain. Others go further back to  
22 Egypt. Others of them kind of say that  
23 she is impartial based on the blindfold  
24 and, therefore, she can weigh the  
25 evidence pro and con without prejudice.

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2 Others say that the reason she doesn't  
3 have the blindfold on is to be able to  
4 see the evidence and see the truth of the  
5 matter and create justice.

6 Well, that's a good segue for  
7 the Justice Reform Committee, and whether  
8 or not Lady Justice should have her  
9 blindfold on or her blindfold off is not  
10 for us to decide. What we are deciding  
11 is some of the disparate impacts of those  
12 positions and trying to take a deeper  
13 dive into why. And so statistically when  
14 we see that justice impacts one race,  
15 group or people more so than the other,  
16 we'd like to know why and look into what  
17 those causes are so that we don't just  
18 start with the trial. And as my  
19 colleague put it, and this is something  
20 that I give her credit for, coined the  
21 phrase, instead of reentry, to focus some  
22 of our time and our talent on pre-entry.  
23 And I think if nothing else, which we've  
24 discovered a great many things, but if  
25 nothing else, that's one that I

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2 personally as a Councilman am going to  
3 hold on to.

4 We have had over a dozen  
5 hearings. We've had over a dozen visits  
6 to different municipalities ranging from  
7 Bradford County for day reporting to  
8 NOBLE in Washington, DC. We've had New  
9 Jersey, the State of New Jersey, come in  
10 and talk about their evolution and  
11 thinking about bail and cash bail. We've  
12 even now, since we started this journey,  
13 realized that Alaska, the State of  
14 Alaska, has evolved in their thinking on  
15 criminal justice.

16 Since then, we've had one or  
17 two major elections, I think, with a new  
18 wave of thinking that has come in that  
19 cannot be ignored. It is a mandate. And  
20 so as we continue this Committee's  
21 efforts, we're trying to today balance  
22 some of that out.

23 People who are for a  
24 restorative justice model but also have  
25 been on the other side of being a victim

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2 of criminal activity also need to have  
3 their voices heard within these Chambers  
4 as well so that we can take into all of  
5 the varying opinions and perspectives to  
6 create the best model of restorative  
7 justice.

8 I would be remiss if I did not  
9 credit and give homage even to the  
10 Criminal Justice Advisory Board, CJAB,  
11 which even before the two years that we  
12 started this was on this track to find  
13 better ways to provide public safety for  
14 the citizens of Philadelphia.

15 I would be remiss if I did not  
16 recognize their work, along with the  
17 non-profit sector who have come up with  
18 suggestions, and we're kind of all  
19 working to get to the same place,  
20 starting in different places but to get  
21 to that same location.

22 And with that, I'm going to  
23 turn it over to my Co-Chairs to give a  
24 statement, and then we want to hear from  
25 the new participants to this band of

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2 merry often men and women.

3 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Thank you.

4 Thank you, Councilman Jones.

5 Good morning. First, I do want  
6 to thank you, Councilman Jones, for your  
7 leadership on this effort. When we  
8 started this journey, it wasn't -- I  
9 would say that we didn't have the  
10 political will to really talk about some  
11 of the things we're talking about and  
12 make the changes that we are suggesting  
13 and recommending, but now we see that we  
14 were on the forefront of those things,  
15 and I'm glad that we were able to bring  
16 all, like you said, all of these  
17 different disciplines together, the  
18 community, City Council members,  
19 stakeholders in the criminal justice  
20 system together to say we're all working  
21 on the same thing, let's try to figure  
22 out where we can make the best of it,  
23 because we all have different pieces to  
24 add.

25 With that, I am happy that

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2 Kevin Bethel, our Co-Chair, did want to  
3 highlight this very, very important area  
4 of our criminal justice, which are our  
5 victims. We've been talking a lot about  
6 reforms and talking a lot about the  
7 people that are in here, but we also need  
8 to talk about those who are hurt by  
9 others, because like Councilman Jones  
10 says, hurt people hurt people. But we  
11 need to recognize and we're talking about  
12 public safety, if we only look at public  
13 safety from a law enforcement standpoint,  
14 we're going to miss the opportunities to  
15 deal with the social needs that people  
16 have before they wind up in our system.  
17 And so the pre-entry portion is really  
18 important.

19 And I do want to just give a  
20 special shout-out to a person that's  
21 going to be talking today, and I know it  
22 may be a little tough for him. I'm not  
23 sure. And, that is, Kempis Songster. He  
24 will today let us know his story as a  
25 child and how he grew up and the things



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2 that he witnessed and he wished that  
3 someone would have intervened and  
4 prevented decisions that were made. But  
5 now he's had a long time to reflect on  
6 everything that has happened to him and  
7 he has come on the other side and wants  
8 to help with some of the issues that we  
9 are facing with now with some of our  
10 youth.

11 I hear people saying we got to  
12 stop this gun violence, we got to stop  
13 this violence, but there is not a lot of  
14 plausible, practical solutions to do  
15 that. I say we have an interesting group  
16 of people coming out of our -- returning  
17 into our community, and, that is, the  
18 juvenile lifers, and if anyone, anyone  
19 can really give us some insight as to  
20 what should happen or what we can do  
21 practically step by step or how to look  
22 at this and where to recognize it, is it  
23 in school, is it when they go to the  
24 doctor's office, wherever they are, let's  
25 meet people where they are and give them

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2 the knowledge and information and the  
3 resources they need so that they don't  
4 become a kid that is less empathetic to  
5 others and we end up here in the criminal  
6 justice system talking about yet another  
7 death and another shooting.

8 So I want to make sure that we  
9 give everyone the respect to discuss  
10 their story. Despite whatever you may  
11 think about anything that's happened to  
12 them in their life, I think we should  
13 respect them, keep an open mind. And  
14 like we said, restorative justice means  
15 welcoming our citizens back into the  
16 community and giving them whatever they  
17 need to restore themselves and restore  
18 their community. That is not just a  
19 notion; it is an actual way of dealing  
20 with people.

21 So with that, I will turn this  
22 over. Thank you.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BETHEL: So  
24 I'll be extremely brief. First and  
25 foremost, I want to thank all of you for

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2 being here, and I want to thank my  
3 Co-Chairs for when we raised this  
4 conversation, and I said we cannot talk  
5 about criminal justice reform without  
6 talking about victims. We cannot talk  
7 about criminal reform if we don't talk  
8 about trauma and the impact it has and  
9 the toxic stress and what happens in our  
10 communities after these incidents occur.

11 And so I'm just so thankful for  
12 all of you being here today to share your  
13 stories and talk about this subject in a  
14 more holistic way so we do not lose the  
15 voice of the victims in this entire  
16 conversation. As we go down this path, I  
17 believe reform is the right path, but it  
18 must be running parallel with our victims  
19 and understanding the issues that they  
20 have, the supports you need in the  
21 community and the funding that you need  
22 to continue to do the great work that  
23 many of you I know personally do each and  
24 every day.

25 So on behalf, I'm sure, of the

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2 Committee and all of us and myself  
3 personally, I thank you for taking the  
4 time to come out here today to have this  
5 conversation.

6 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you so  
7 much.

8 So we'll start from my right to  
9 the left. Mr. District Attorney,  
10 welcome.

11 MR. KRASNER: Thank you. Thank  
12 you, Councilman. I will also be very  
13 brief. Obviously we are at a turning  
14 point, I hope, in the City of  
15 Philadelphia's approach to criminal  
16 justice. We are also blessed this  
17 morning, because this time last year  
18 there were 30 homicides and this year we  
19 have 16. It is the lowest number in at  
20 least 11 years. I am well aware it has  
21 not a thing to do with me. No question  
22 about that. It does have a lot to do  
23 with things people did a year ago and two  
24 years ago and five years ago and things  
25 that law enforcement do on the streets

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2 every day and then some other things we,  
3 frankly, can't control, like the weather.  
4 But we are blessed that we have half the  
5 number of homicides that we had last  
6 year.

7 And as we move forward  
8 together, hopefully in a year when there  
9 will be less blood on the streets, when  
10 there will be more progress towards the  
11 kinds of things that prevent homicides in  
12 the future, I look forward to working  
13 with all of you. I look forward to your  
14 hearing from our new victims coordinator  
15 and, that is, Movita Johnson-Harrell, who  
16 will be testifying this morning, and  
17 thank you all for being here.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,  
19 Mr. District Attorney, for being a part  
20 of this, because you opted to do this.  
21 This is not part of your mandate, but it  
22 is a part of your mission. I thank you.

23 Your Honor, long time in  
24 coming.

25 JUDGE DeLEON: Councilman

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2 Jones, I'm just so happy that you have  
3 the wherewithal and the insight to put  
4 together a committee of this magnitude  
5 for the citizens of Philadelphia.

6 Basically it took me a long time to get  
7 on this committee, but here I am, and one  
8 of the things that I believe in is that  
9 in Philadelphia, we need to take up  
10 what's known as shared responsibility to  
11 bring back hope to our returning citizens  
12 and hope to our traumatized victims,  
13 because it takes the effort of both the  
14 elected officials, the leaders of the  
15 community, the victim, the incarcerated,  
16 the returning home citizen, all of them  
17 working together to better our city, to  
18 better our community. It can't just be  
19 one-sided. It has to be all-sided,  
20 because in order for us to bring them  
21 back, they have to participate in making  
22 them whole again, because we're here  
23 trying to give hope and faith to our  
24 citizens.

25 When we have 7,000 inmates

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2 coming out of prisons per month and  
3 186,000 probationers right here in the  
4 City of Philadelphia, that's a lot of  
5 people that we have to give hope to,  
6 because in giving them hope, it gives  
7 their family hope and it gives our  
8 community hope, and it's measures such as  
9 what you're doing here with bringing this  
10 committee together that goes a long way  
11 in the first step to making sure that all  
12 citizens here in Philadelphia know that  
13 we're bringing back hope to this city and  
14 our citizens.

15 COUNCILMAN JONES: Your Honor,  
16 welcome, and you were well worth waiting  
17 for.

18 Will the Clerk please read  
19 those members who are in attendance for  
20 the record so we can memorialize that and  
21 then we will bring the first committee to  
22 testify to the witness stand.

23 THE CLERK: Members of the  
24 Committee who are present are: Wilfredo  
25 Rojas, Claire Shubik-Richards, Judge

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2 DeLeon, Keir Bradford-Grey, Councilman  
3 Curtis Jones Jr., Kevin Bethel, Dean John  
4 Hollway, Julie Wertheimer, and Larry  
5 Krasner.

6 COUNCILMAN JONES: Will you  
7 please read the first witness group to  
8 testify today.

9 THE CLERK: Aleida Garcia and  
10 Wilfredo Rojas.

11 (Witnesses approached witness  
12 table.)

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: For those  
14 testifying today, always state your name  
15 for the stenographer for the record so  
16 that we can make sure that's in there.

17 MS. GARCIA: My name is Aleida  
18 Garcia.

19 I'm over here. I have a  
20 PowerPoint.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: You got me.

22 MS. GARCIA: And I'm the mother  
23 of Alejandro Rojas-Garcia, who was  
24 murdered on January 24th, 2015, also the  
25 and Co-Founder and President of the



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2 National Homicide Justice Alliance.

3 So what I'm testifying to today  
4 is my own story and the stories of people  
5 that I have been involved with  
6 personally, and this is for you to see  
7 what it looks like from our perspective  
8 as co-victims of homicide, as a mother  
9 who has lost her child. It's not meant  
10 to be theoretical. It's not meant to be  
11 lofty. It's meant to be the factual  
12 events that I have actually witnessed and  
13 lived through. My story may be different  
14 than the story of other people, but I can  
15 only really recount my own.

16 I think it's very important for  
17 us to understand that all of these  
18 numbers that we're talking about, it's  
19 down by 15 or up by 15 or whatever  
20 numbers we're talking about, each number  
21 is a human being. In my case, you know,  
22 Alejandro Rojas-Garcia, he was a loving  
23 son, father, brother, uncle, friend. And  
24 we have to understand that for every life  
25 that is taken, many other lives are

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2 affected.

3 Here's a photo and the news --  
4 this is the news hyperlink for the news  
5 that was given about his death, where he  
6 was shot 14 times through the window of  
7 his vehicle.

8 The first thing that happens is  
9 we get notified. So early in the  
10 morning, two detectives came to my home  
11 and knocked on the door very hard, but I  
12 wasn't home. I was actually at work that  
13 day. It was a Saturday morning and I was  
14 teaching at a part-time job that I had.  
15 And my daughter answered the door. She  
16 was all alone. The two detectives told  
17 her that her brother was dead, and then  
18 they went to my job to tell me the same  
19 thing. Meanwhile, she's home alone with  
20 the news, calling me saying that she  
21 wants to come to where I am. And I  
22 didn't know why she wanted to come. She  
23 wouldn't tell me. And the two detectives  
24 came to see me. They were great  
25 detectives, but they weren't trained in

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2 crisis intervention or they didn't do  
3 crisis intervention. My daughter was  
4 left alone with this news. Then I  
5 immediately, after I stopped crying, I  
6 told them, Stop my daughter from coming,  
7 and they drove me home. This was my  
8 notification.

9 The next thing that happened  
10 was the Medical Examiner's Office. And,  
11 once again, because I was still believing  
12 that maybe they made a mistake, that it  
13 wasn't true, Medical Examiner's Office, I  
14 went down there, and they show you a  
15 photo, and everybody starts breaking down  
16 again. I wanted to see my son's body.  
17 My son had been shot 14 times, and I  
18 didn't know what to expect, but I still  
19 wanted to see his body, because I wanted  
20 to make sure for myself that it was him.  
21 So they did show me his body.

22 Some of the concerns that I've  
23 had that I've heard shared by other  
24 people is, does my son's life matter to  
25 anyone? Is my son significant enough in

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2 this society to get justice? Will the  
3 police find the killer? Do I know the  
4 killer? Are they the person -- before  
5 the case had a suspect, I was walking  
6 around -- and I think that people that  
7 have unsolved cases could verify this --  
8 walking around not knowing who that  
9 killer was. I didn't know if I was  
10 shaking that person's hand, that person  
11 was behind me. We've had a case within  
12 our group that the person who was  
13 responsible for the homicide was actually  
14 marching around saying they wanted  
15 justice for Stephanie when in fact they  
16 were the killer.

17 What about getting threatened?  
18 Will they threaten me? Will they burn my  
19 house down? Are they going to threaten  
20 the witnesses?

21 There's a lack of systemic  
22 crisis intervention. So to a certain  
23 degree, I had the person from the  
24 Homicide Unit who was the victim advocate  
25 for the unit come out and visit me, and

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2 she was very good, but there wasn't a  
3 real systemic kind of way to help with  
4 detectives deal with the families.

5 And then after that, it seemed  
6 like no one was really assigned to the  
7 family to keep them updated. So we just  
8 basically had to, you know, be reaching  
9 out to them.

10 So what happens next is sort of  
11 shock, disbelief, and grief. There's  
12 nothing that will ever be the same.

13 You're not the same person. Your life is  
14 different. You have to start to define  
15 yourself in a different way. And there's  
16 a severe decrease in all areas of  
17 wellness, in every emotional, physical,  
18 social, financial, occupational.

19 I couldn't work for 16 months.  
20 I lost my income. You know, I was crying  
21 constantly. And this is not an unusual  
22 scenario. Feeling vulnerable, feeling  
23 confused, feeling clumsy, feeling beat  
24 down. And it takes a lot to stand up. I  
25 have an incredible amount of respect for

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2 all the mothers and family members that  
3 actually stand up, because it's amazing  
4 how to stand up when you're really beat  
5 down.

6 You have fear, heightened  
7 sensitivity to noise, people, social,  
8 familial situations. You feel isolated,  
9 angry, lots and lots of anger, hopeless,  
10 helpless, feeling like death is always  
11 imminent.

12 I hear a lot of young kids  
13 saying, you know, tomorrow is not  
14 promised. That's probably why they say  
15 it, because that's how you start to feel  
16 when all this violence is around you.  
17 You have a loss of interest in life and  
18 you feel that your environment -- you  
19 perceive your environment to be very  
20 hostile and uncaring, and you feel like  
21 the victim is frequently blamed.

22 I think that a lot of families  
23 feel that the killer gets a second chance  
24 or that people want the killer to get a  
25 second chance, but we know that our

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2 children will never get a second chance.  
3 They have no rights. They had no trial.  
4 They were executed, and there is no way  
5 for them to reenter society.

6 The other things that we deal  
7 with is feelings of guilt. We should  
8 have protected the victim. Sometimes I  
9 honestly think that I should have been  
10 there to catch the bullet. I should have  
11 been there. I should have been there the  
12 day before. What if I had done something  
13 different? Could I have changed the  
14 trajectory of the events? You have to  
15 struggle to forgive yourself, forgive any  
16 family members. Sometimes we talk about,  
17 you know, oh, on such-and-such a day, I  
18 forgot, you know, it was his birthday or  
19 something like that. Something as simple  
20 as that will haunt you. Any  
21 disagreements with the deceased, the  
22 memory of a mutilated body at the morgue.  
23 Though I have to say that the Coroner's  
24 Office did an amazing job of making sure  
25 that we were able to look at the body

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2 without actually seeing the injuries.

3 We ask ourselves, could he or  
4 she have been saved? Did anyone call  
5 911? Will anyone step up to give  
6 information? Will the police really  
7 care? There's lack of information in a  
8 very complex system. Feeling constantly  
9 traumatized, having to be the ones who  
10 educate others that do not understand and  
11 are often insensitive to our plight.  
12 Lack of qualified counseling at Victim  
13 Services specifically for families of  
14 homicide. We feel unable to focus, to  
15 work, to manage home life for extended  
16 periods of time.

17 So investigation suggests  
18 that -- and this is from -- I quoted my  
19 citation, that violent deaths, the grief  
20 of violent death is very severe.  
21 Perpetual grief, loss of ability to  
22 function, problems on the job and home,  
23 negative effects on family members. A  
24 lot of people have to go right back and  
25 care for somebody in their family, like a



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2 parent or other children.

3 So the vigil, let me tell you  
4 about the vigil. When I went to the  
5 vigil, Alex's vigil, I was completely  
6 stone-faced. I had absolutely no  
7 expression, absolutely -- because in my  
8 mind somehow I was in some kind of shock,  
9 and I stayed like that for about a year.  
10 But the reason -- the real reason for  
11 doing vigil is because the family wants  
12 to distribute flyers to see if anybody  
13 has information, to get the word out,  
14 because ultimately I think we feel like  
15 nobody is watching, you know.

16 Then the funeral, an unexpected  
17 funeral, a feeling that you have to have  
18 this perfect funeral for the deceased, a  
19 fear that when you can't afford the  
20 funeral, when you don't have the money to  
21 put deposits down on the funeral, that  
22 somehow that person won't get buried.  
23 You know, this is a fear.

24 Friends that don't know what to  
25 do, relationships falling apart. The

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2 financial burden is quite heavy, because  
3 you're not expecting this, and you're  
4 looking for a decent funeral. Often  
5 funerals cost \$10,000. The Victims Crime  
6 Compensation doesn't come right away.

7 So one of the things I found  
8 out in learning about Victims  
9 Compensation, that there is in  
10 Philadelphia a complex and disjointed  
11 system that one must navigate while being  
12 traumatized, overwhelmed, and feeling  
13 vulnerable.

14 I want to talk a little bit  
15 about working with homicide detectives  
16 too. I really believe -- and this is  
17 really important for me. I really  
18 believe that we have to take a look and  
19 ask the Homicide Unit what they need to  
20 do a better job, what they need, what do  
21 they need. Ask them, talk to them, see  
22 what they need. I don't want to tell you  
23 what they need, because one thing I know  
24 that they need is more cooperation from  
25 witnesses, but they also need to answer

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2 the phones. They also need to have that  
3 outreach with people. But I want you to  
4 ask them what they need, because our  
5 clearance rate is very low. Homicides  
6 went up last year.

7 I want to talk about unsolved  
8 murders. So we have a group of people  
9 here today with unsolved murders, if you  
10 want to stand up. Could you tell us your  
11 name of your son.

12 MS. SINGLETON: My name is  
13 Trina Singleton and on September 13th,  
14 2016, the day before his 25th birthday,  
15 my son Darryl Singleton was shot and  
16 killed in the area behind our house, and  
17 we have been working with detectives for  
18 the last year, but our case is still  
19 unsolved, and it has been very difficult  
20 to get information from the detectives.  
21 It has been very difficult working with  
22 the detectives and trying to understand  
23 what direction this case is going in. So  
24 I'm not really sure what's going on.  
25 It's saying we're working on it all the

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2 time, but I have no idea what path this  
3 is going on. And they also let me know  
4 that after two years, they won't be  
5 working this case the same way. So I  
6 feel like we're on a timeline to get  
7 justice for my son or else he's just  
8 going to be forgotten and the killer is  
9 going to go free or continue to go free  
10 and kill other people.

11 So thank you for listening.

12 MS. ROBBINS: My name is Yullio  
13 Robbins. I'm here today on behalf of our  
14 son. My husband is in the back there.  
15 His name was James Walke. He was  
16 brutally murdered February 23rd, 2016 in  
17 the streets of Germantown. He was shot  
18 14 times, 2 o'clock in the afternoon. As  
19 of now, nobody has spoken up or tried to  
20 see what happened. There was a video,  
21 but it wasn't really clear.

22 My detective is pretty good. I  
23 have faith in him, and I know he's going  
24 to solve my son's murder. And on behalf  
25 of all the other mothers here, you know,

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2 we're all struggling with this every day.  
3 Every day it's a battle for us. Day,  
4 night, just every -- it's just rough.

5 MS. PICHARDO: My name is Roz  
6 Pichardo. This is Talbert Jackson, my  
7 boyfriend. He was murdered. The case is  
8 solved.

9 My brother, Alexander Martinez,  
10 it's been six years. Case is unsolved.  
11 And as a survivor of an attempted  
12 homicide myself, I'm here to stand up and  
13 try to find ways to get people involved  
14 and hope you guys really take into  
15 account of helping the homicide  
16 detectives and finding out exactly what  
17 they need to solve the cases here in  
18 Philly.

19 MS. CRUZ: My name is Jessie  
20 Alejandro Cruz. I'm here representing my  
21 cousin who was murdered November 18,  
22 2016. He was murdered cold-blooded in  
23 front of a store on Rising Sun Avenue  
24 while getting a haircut. His case has  
25 been unsolved. I'm here to represent my

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2 family, because his mother yet has been  
3 unable to speak out for her son and have  
4 not been able yet to receive any type of  
5 news from anyone that have come to her or  
6 spoken to her about her son's death.

7 So we're just here with  
8 everyone that is here to support them on  
9 what they're doing and trying to get the  
10 murders that have been unsolved to be  
11 solved. And I think -- I believe that  
12 we're going to be blessed the day that we  
13 hear that there have been no murders at  
14 all. That's all I want to say.

15 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you  
16 for your testimony, ladies.

17 MS. BRYANT: Hello. My name is  
18 Eva Bryant. I'm here on behalf of my  
19 son, Hakim Bryant, who was killed March  
20 20th, 2016. He was attending a birthday  
21 party and one of his friends got into an  
22 altercation. The friend ran down the  
23 street. The gunman shot at the friend  
24 and my son was standing on the sideline.  
25 He was shot one time to his lower back,

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2 severed his aortas, and they were unable  
3 to save him. He left behind a  
4 five-year-old daughter that no longer has  
5 a father. And at this time today, the  
6 killer has not been found. Nothing has  
7 been done. Each time I call the  
8 detective, he tells me, We have no more  
9 news, nothing else.

10 I'm just praying and hoping  
11 that one day the person that took my  
12 son's life and my granddaughter's father  
13 and my daughter's brother and my mother's  
14 grandson will be found.

15 COUNCILMAN JONES: Is that the  
16 group?

17 MS. DELGADO: Good morning. My  
18 name is Nerva Delgado and I'm here on  
19 behalf of my grandson, Batul Adams, who  
20 was murdered March 24th, 2017. They have  
21 caught one of the murderers, but the  
22 other one is still on the run and it's  
23 going on a year.

24 We're out here because my  
25 daughter, we all need justice for this

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2 murder, which is uncalled for. It was a  
3 setup, and something has to be done. I  
4 don't know what or how, but I would  
5 really appreciate if we could just get  
6 something done here.

7 Thank you.

8 MS. GARCIA: So you can really  
9 feel the pain that's in this room right  
10 now, and I thank everybody for giving  
11 their testimony.

12 These are some of the unsolved  
13 cases. These are flyers that we as  
14 community people make and put out there.  
15 And I think what Trina alluded to is that  
16 after two years in Philadelphia, it  
17 becomes a cold case.

18 So I want to talk about the  
19 District Attorney's Office. Some of the  
20 frustrations that co-victims have at  
21 trial is feeling public sympathy for  
22 murderers, light sentences, and second  
23 chances for convicted murderers, but no  
24 rights or second chances for our  
25 children. People who say that it's not



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2 our case, it's the defendant's case,  
3 we're very invested in the case. The  
4 feeling that the convicted murderer is  
5 never found -- if ever found, gets all  
6 the rights and attention. Survivors of  
7 homicide victims have few rights.  
8 Outrage about the leniency for sentencing  
9 for murder. In a lot of cases -- and we  
10 have statistics on this -- you get a  
11 higher sentence for property crimes than  
12 you would -- for example, if you have two  
13 kilos, you might get more than if you  
14 shot somebody and they don't have all the  
15 evidence they need to put you -- to  
16 sentence that person.

17 Disparities in the judicial  
18 system, frequently punishments for other  
19 crimes are greater than for the crime of  
20 taking a human life. And I think that's  
21 something the Committee should look at.  
22 You should look at the equity in that.

23 And, like I said, I'm saying  
24 this as a citizen, as a mother. I am not  
25 an attorney. You know, I am not a

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2 legislator. I'm just saying this as  
3 somebody who has lost a child and looks  
4 at the system and talks to other people  
5 about it.

6 We feel anger over plea bargain  
7 arrangements and agreements, frustrations  
8 not being allowed inside a courtroom at  
9 the time of trial, unanswered questions,  
10 postponements, and a lot of loss of faith  
11 in the criminal justice system.

12 So the last thing -- I just  
13 want to wrap it up, but I just want to  
14 say that families of murder victims live  
15 in limbo. You live in limbo when it's  
16 unsolved. You live in limbo when you're  
17 waiting for the trial. And you live in  
18 limbo through whatever appeals happen.  
19 And if you're coming back, if you're  
20 coming back to court for a juvenile  
21 offender that's now returning to society,  
22 however you may feel about that, it will  
23 open up all the wounds again. And I was  
24 in court recently with a family that I  
25 know very well who is going through that,

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2 and whether you agree with it or don't  
3 agree with it, from the victim's  
4 perspective, it is re-traumatizing.

5 I just want to tell you quickly  
6 why we advocate. We advocate --  
7 basically all this is saying that we want  
8 the victims to have a voice, to be  
9 empowered, and to understand the system  
10 to be able to navigate it. We want cases  
11 solved. And this I just took off the  
12 Internet yesterday. So as of January  
13 27th, you see there were 15 homicides.  
14 Last year there were 317. It's too early  
15 to tell right now what this means. We're  
16 only -- we're less than a month into the  
17 year, but we will see what's going on.

18 Philadelphia has a higher  
19 murder rate than the entire State of  
20 Pennsylvania per capita. And you can  
21 see, this was actually in 2014. Some of  
22 the statistics you get are like from past  
23 years, but in 2014, you can see that we  
24 had the highest grouping of murders per  
25 capita.

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2 The highest way of committing  
3 murder is by firearms. The highest  
4 reason for committing murders is either  
5 arguments or drugs. And you can find all  
6 that information on the Philadelphia  
7 Police website. They've done a pretty  
8 good job of putting together the  
9 information.

10 And the last thing I want to  
11 talk about is if for some chance you want  
12 to talk about not just the loss of life,  
13 but it costs \$17 to \$25 million per  
14 homicide. And I cited the FBI website.  
15 And also a sociologist in Iowa, Matt  
16 DeLisi, who is known for this work,  
17 calculated not only the side of the  
18 victim but also the side of the offender,  
19 and that cost together for each homicide  
20 is about \$17 to \$25 million, including  
21 incarceration. And I think what that  
22 really looks like is that we really need  
23 to put a lot of money into prevention and  
24 response, because ultimately that is what  
25 is going to make this problem at least if

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2 it doesn't go away completely, at least  
3 so we can bring it down.

4 Okay. So I thank you. Thank  
5 you for the opportunity. I'm very  
6 grateful to have the opportunity to  
7 speak.

8 Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: So we've had  
10 a lot of hearings, and this one is  
11 unique. Actually there was one other.  
12 And we tend to not totally understand,  
13 empathize, and feel that whenever we talk  
14 about restorative justice, there's  
15 another side of this, and they are the  
16 victims.

17 So thank you for sharing that  
18 with us. And we'll continue on with  
19 Mr. Rojas.

20 MR. ROJAS: My name is Wilfredo  
21 Rojas. I am the father of Alejandro  
22 Rojas-Garcia and a Co-Founder of the  
23 National Homicide Justice Alliance. And  
24 I want to ask you this: What do you say  
25 or what do you do when someone begins to

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2 describe the details of a loved one's  
3 murder? Do you talk about your own  
4 family member who was murdered? Do you  
5 ignore the person?

6 In our case, I was lucky. We  
7 got a man who was in charge of police,  
8 fire, and prisons who Aleida and I went  
9 to see him, and he said, I have never met  
10 a close friend who has lost somebody to  
11 homicide. I will do everything within my  
12 power to try and make sure that you get  
13 justice for your son.

14 We had the police detectives  
15 who contacted us on a daily basis, and we  
16 actually went to the Homicide Unit to see  
17 the dilapidation of the building where  
18 they were working at and old files and  
19 outdated files. We also got in contact  
20 with the media. The media was very good  
21 in helping us apprehend and have the  
22 suspect turn himself in, and the  
23 witnesses came forward. We also had a  
24 great District Attorney who was assigned  
25 to us who not only took our case, but we

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2 had regular meetings with our District  
3 Attorney, because he heard our voices.  
4 And we believe that witnesses should also  
5 be part and parcel of the conversation  
6 around issues of murder victims.

7 I worked in the system, and a  
8 lot of times we don't involve families in  
9 solving cases. We were very instrumental  
10 in resolving that case on Twitter, on  
11 Facebook, through our family. We were  
12 able to smoke him out, and he turned  
13 himself in.

14 What we need is a few things.  
15 Number one, we need a first responder.  
16 The District Attorney, great job, but  
17 they're not trained as grief counselors.  
18 The police, they need a hotline. We need  
19 a hotline where people can call and get  
20 information as to what can I do, because  
21 it is, like Aleida said, a very  
22 complicated criminal justice system. But  
23 it's like a wheel of fortune when it  
24 comes to families of murder victims. You  
25 might get the bonus prize or you might

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2 get nothing. We want a system where you  
3 actually land on the prize so the victims  
4 can also have justice as everybody else  
5 is having justice.

6 We believe that there should be  
7 an executive office by the Mayor. If we  
8 can have an executive office for veterans  
9 affairs and other issues, we have a  
10 crisis in Philadelphia. We have a  
11 homicide epidemic. We should have an  
12 office that coordinates our complaints.  
13 The complaints that these ladies have,  
14 silence is not going to work. If they  
15 continue to be the squeaky wheel, someone  
16 hears them, they can connect them. Why  
17 isn't the DA calling you, a phone call?  
18 DA, what's going on with this? They can  
19 serve as a liaison between the families  
20 and the lack of services from the  
21 agencies that are charged with providing  
22 services to the families.

23 We also would like to train  
24 District Attorneys, train them, have  
25 families of murder victims like these



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2 ladies spoke today, have them trained,  
3 not some professional, which is great and  
4 wonderful, but you have to also include  
5 families of murder victims in those  
6 trainings or the District Attorney of the  
7 Police Department. They do it in  
8 Chicago. They train police departments  
9 on issues related to murder. So you  
10 sensitize the Police Department, you  
11 sensitize the District Attorneys, and you  
12 sensitize everybody that's connected with  
13 the criminal justice system.

14 At the prisons, we have to  
15 have -- we have anger management there.  
16 We have to begin to do therapy sessions  
17 with the actual people that committed  
18 these offenses and talk and let them  
19 speak about what it feels like.

20 When I was at the prison, I can  
21 tell you a lot of stories about people  
22 that actually committed the crime of  
23 murder. And I'm not at liberty to talk  
24 about it because of confidentiality, but  
25 it was like nothing. It was like there

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2 was no feeling. There was no affect. It  
3 was done. People describe murders when  
4 you're in a one-to-one counseling  
5 situation. And I think that what we need  
6 to do is have the prison have some kind  
7 of therapeutic session for all of the  
8 inmates around the issue of murder and  
9 the effects on the families taught by  
10 family members so they can actually feel.  
11 Because it's not what you say; it's how  
12 you make people feel, and you have to  
13 make people feel like they're also a part  
14 of solving -- the search to solving the  
15 problem of homicide in the City of  
16 Philadelphia.

17 We're committed as the National  
18 Homicide Justice Alliance and the women  
19 who spoke today. We're committed to  
20 engage more men in our effort and we're  
21 committed to forging a partnership with  
22 the legislative branch, with the  
23 executive branch, and with the department  
24 heads, the District Attorney's Office to  
25 try and wrap our arms around this problem

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2 and solve it. We have solutions. Aleida  
3 and I were able to arrest the suspect.  
4 Our District Attorney was there for us.  
5 He walked -- he talked the talk and  
6 walked the walk with us. We would like  
7 that for every family, not because we  
8 knew the system. We shouldn't be getting  
9 special treatment. Every single citizen  
10 in the City of Philadelphia should be  
11 afforded the same treatment and the same  
12 respect and the same hand-holding through  
13 the system. And I think that this  
14 Committee and our report, I think we have  
15 an opportunity to really let the citizens  
16 of Philadelphia know that murder in our  
17 city will not be tolerated, because you  
18 can forgive but you have to be punished.  
19 I mean, you can't have forgiveness  
20 without some sort of punishment. And all  
21 we're asking for is justice, and justice  
22 in terms of punishment will be decided by  
23 the jury and by the courts and by the  
24 judge. But if you -- if we forgive,  
25 someone has to pay for our son's death.

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2 And that concludes our  
3 testimony. Thank you so much.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you so  
5 much for your testimony.

6 Are there questions from the  
7 panel?

8 (No response.)

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: Comments  
10 from the panel?

11 (No response.)

12 COUNCILMAN JONES: Well, I have  
13 a couple. Do you know the closure rate  
14 for murder in the City of Philadelphia  
15 today?

16 MS. GARCIA: Yes.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: What  
18 percentage?

19 MS. GARCIA: 37 percent.

20 COUNCILMAN JONES: 37 percent.  
21 And of that -- so that means -- I went to  
22 public school -- you have a one in three  
23 chance of getting caught --

24 MS. GARCIA: Yes.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: -- if you

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2 commit murder in the City of  
3 Philadelphia.

4 MS. GARCIA: As it is now, yes.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: So as a  
6 panel when we talk about criminal justice  
7 reform, loss of life, serious crime,  
8 shootings are in a very different  
9 category for us. I guess I'm speaking  
10 for the group or I'm speaking for myself.

11 As we look at how we can reduce  
12 the census, some people -- we went up to  
13 State Road, and even the inmates, two  
14 dozen or so, said some people belong in  
15 here. And I think when we talk about  
16 homicide, that clearly for me fits that  
17 category for public safety purposes.  
18 Now, the lesser crimes are feeders  
19 sometimes. If we can prevent and divert  
20 and intervene at the lower levels of  
21 crimes, we prevent these instances if  
22 a -- and I learned this. If a kid is  
23 crying out for help early, you should  
24 listen and believe him.

25 The hardest part of my job, bar

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2 none, is trying to talk to a parent who  
3 has lost their child. You can't console  
4 them. You really can't relate totally,  
5 but what I find to be helpful as a  
6 legislator is when they share that grief,  
7 they also share the solutions.

8 In one case, I'm in North  
9 Philadelphia and we're going through and  
10 that particular parent cared and was  
11 stricken by the loss of their child, but  
12 in the next breath was talking about  
13 trying to save their friends of the child  
14 that they lost and what you were going to  
15 do to try to make sure this doesn't get  
16 repeated over and over and over again.

17 So a part of our mission is to  
18 prevent ever getting here. I mentioned  
19 care in the sense of coining the phrase  
20 pre-entry and that if we can identify  
21 individual triggers and signals from  
22 young people to say, hey, I need  
23 intervention, I need help early, we can  
24 prevent this day. And so a lot of our  
25 attention has been spent on those kind of

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2 preventive measures, because there's  
3 nothing to save after we get to this  
4 point. It's said and done. And so we  
5 appreciate you sharing.

6 MS. GARCIA: The Philadelphia  
7 Police are gathering data. I think that  
8 a good -- take a look at the data,  
9 because they have been able to identify  
10 the leading motives, the locations where  
11 most homicides occur, how they occur. I  
12 mean, there's a lot of data that can be  
13 used to do the kind of things you're  
14 trying to do. And I can say that it is a  
15 natural consequence to think about  
16 prevention and response in the same  
17 sentence, because all of us have other  
18 children and all of us have other people  
19 we love. So it may have happened to us,  
20 but that's not the end. We need to  
21 prevent it from happening to someone  
22 else. And we do have more than one  
23 mother in our group that has lost two  
24 children. So one in particular lost a  
25 son 20 years ago and then last year lost

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2 her daughter, both to gun violence. And  
3 so obviously that is our concern as well.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: So one of  
5 the spin-offs of this Committee is,  
6 Councilman Johnson has created a Gun  
7 Violence Task Force and, quite frankly,  
8 it's a daunting task, and the reason I  
9 say that is, we had an opportunity -- we  
10 get sued, elected officials, by the NRA  
11 when we bring up gun -- literally get  
12 sued by them saying that we're infringing  
13 upon their constitutional right.

14 I had an opportunity to go with  
15 President Clarke and Councilman Johnson  
16 five miles outside of the City, in King  
17 of Prussia, to a gun show. I've never  
18 seen that many guns in my life. Imagine  
19 the Convention Center floor filled with  
20 tables of guns. And it wasn't just folk  
21 that you would stereotype that were  
22 buying them. These were folks that were  
23 making transactions and then making  
24 second transactions in a parking lot  
25 outside. And the ATF was aware of some



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2 of the kinds of movements, but felt  
3 underfunded, and the signal from the  
4 federal government was unless you have a  
5 specific case, you cannot blanket the  
6 entire gun show in an investigatory  
7 process.

8           So when I walked out of there,  
9 I got to admit -- and I'm an optimistic  
10 person. I believe the glass is half full  
11 all the time, but I felt that that was a  
12 daunting task. We have to fight this  
13 fight on a couple of prongs, and we've  
14 been talking about this in all of our  
15 sessions. We have to stop the  
16 proliferation of firearms in our  
17 community as well, but you got to change  
18 the heart and minds of people that pick  
19 them up.

20           MS. GARCIA: Can I say one more  
21 thing? I think the people that are doing  
22 this -- and our son was killed by a gang  
23 member. There are people in the  
24 community that are held hostage, and this  
25 is a terrorist act, for people to be

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2 using these guns, holding people in the  
3 community hostage. We have your  
4 children, families, elders that are  
5 afraid to sit on their porch.

6 So when we talk about people in  
7 the community, it's a very small number  
8 of people that commit these crimes  
9 compared to the large community. Our  
10 communities are good. People want to do  
11 good things, but then you have people  
12 that are, like I said, holding them  
13 hostage.

14 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: I do have  
15 one quick question and/or comment. I  
16 know recently I found out that Temple  
17 Hospital was trying to address trauma for  
18 gunshot victims. So people who came in,  
19 they had a gunshot wound, generally they  
20 would just kind of patch them up and they  
21 would leave and not necessarily think  
22 about the emotional effect that that may  
23 have and will they be now making  
24 decisions that are based on their  
25 circumstance. You know, maybe I need to

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2 go get a gun now, I just got shot at, or  
3 I got to retaliate.

4 Is there any group that could  
5 team up with Temple Hospital to do that  
6 type of intervention when they are a  
7 victim, when they are purely in the  
8 victim stage, they have not crossed that  
9 line as of yet? Maybe there's more that  
10 we can do with them and bringing groups  
11 like the one that you are discussing,  
12 Wilfredo, to that partnership on  
13 collaboration and just understanding  
14 what's their next choices now. Once they  
15 came in here with this gunshot wound,  
16 what are their choices? What are they  
17 going to be doing once they're released?

18 MS. GARCIA: I think there is a  
19 population that is rarely spoken about  
20 and the number of people that are victims  
21 of shootings is a lot larger. It's in  
22 the thousands. And so how many of those  
23 persons are now quadriplegic, they're not  
24 able to function normally and, like you  
25 said, emotionally what's their next step.

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2 And I don't know that our group is the  
3 right one, but I definitely think that  
4 that's something that should be looked  
5 at. In fact, one of the reasons we don't  
6 have more homicides is because the  
7 hospitals in our area are very good and  
8 are doing things that are helping people  
9 to survive physically.

10 COUNCILMAN JONES: Are there  
11 any others?

12 MS. WERTHEIMER: I was just  
13 going to jump in on the Defender's  
14 comment, Chief Defender's comment, on  
15 programs in the emergency rooms. That's  
16 something that the City's Department of  
17 Behavioral Health has been working on for  
18 a number of years, along with several  
19 hospitals, not just Temple. I think  
20 we're hearing of different programs,  
21 including at Penn and at Drexel. We've  
22 worked with Healing Hurt People.

23 That being said, those programs  
24 have been on a relatively small scale,  
25 and I think it's something we need to

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2 continue to look at, what parts of it are  
3 the most effective, listen to the  
4 community about what parts of it are the  
5 most effective and figure out how we can  
6 scale it up.

7 MR. ROJAS: See, but those are  
8 the kind of programs that I think when we  
9 talked about partnerships, that the  
10 average community member should be aware.  
11 We have the technology to post that  
12 somewhere. So people can actually go or  
13 call some place or go to the Internet and  
14 find those programs so we can begin to  
15 network and partner with those programs,  
16 because a lot of folks are not aware of  
17 everything that's going on around the  
18 issue of gun violence, around the issue  
19 of homicide in the City. There's a  
20 disconnect, and we have to try to pull  
21 that together. There's groups that  
22 march, there's groups that hold vigils,  
23 but there's no coordinated effort  
24 systematically to actually try and  
25 address it through some type of action

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2 steps. And while I appreciate that, I  
3 think we have to have a roundtable  
4 discussion with those groups and the  
5 families.

6 COUNCILMAN JONES: So,  
7 Mr. Rojas, we're going to ask you to join  
8 the panel back and come back and take  
9 your seat. Thank you for your testimony.

10 MS. GARCIA: Thank you.

11 COUNCILMAN JONES: Can you  
12 bring forth the next group to testify,  
13 Ms. Williams.

14 THE CLERK: Dorothy  
15 Johnson-Speight, Valerie Todd-Listman,  
16 and Kempis Songster.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you  
18 and good morning. Thank you for your  
19 patience.

20 (Witnesses approached witness  
21 table.)

22 MR. KRASNER: While we're  
23 setting up, I just wanted to offer to  
24 this group some information that was  
25 provided to me actually by Professor

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2 Marie Gottschalk, University of  
3 Pennsylvania on clearance rates that I  
4 think may be of interest to people here.  
5 It's not good news, but it is the news.

6 Philadelphia currently has a 37  
7 percent clearance rate. If you go back,  
8 frankly, not all that long to 2008 and  
9 2009, you will find it was 75 percent.  
10 It was literally twice as large. If you  
11 look from the year 2000 through 2016,  
12 there has been a steady decline in the  
13 last ten years. Thirty-seven percent is  
14 the lowest clearance rate that I have on  
15 record for the City of Philadelphia. As  
16 recently as 2016, it was at its low at  
17 that time, which was 45 percent.

18 So there is a problem. There  
19 is a huge problem with solving homicide  
20 matters in Philadelphia, and if we look  
21 nationwide, Philadelphia is not the  
22 worst, but it is a clearance rate that is  
23 far below other major cities. For  
24 example, in 2016, New York had a 69  
25 percent clearance rate. Philadelphia was

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2 at 45 percent. We were not as bad as  
3 Detroit, which was 19 percent, but we  
4 were toward the bottom. So there is a  
5 real bona fide decline in clearance rates  
6 in Philadelphia, and one of the important  
7 things we have to consider is how we  
8 improve that.

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you so  
10 much.

11 So we're going to start from my  
12 right, which is here, to left. You bring  
13 the mic closer to you, state your name  
14 for the record and begin your testimony,  
15 please. Welcome to City Council -- I  
16 mean City Hall.

17 MR. SONGSTER: My name is  
18 Kempis Songster. First of all, good  
19 morning, everybody. Councilwomen,  
20 Councilmen, thank you for this incredible  
21 opportunity.

22 After 30 years of  
23 incarceration, I was released about three  
24 weeks ago, a little over three weeks ago,  
25 for a homicide, a senseless act of



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2 violence that I committed in 1987 at the  
3 age of 15.

4 I ran away from home in  
5 Brooklyn, New York, left behind a loving  
6 mother. And I want to say that from the  
7 outset, that my running away was not a  
8 personal referendum against her  
9 motherhood. She was the best mother in  
10 the world. She loved me, did her best as  
11 a single woman of color raising a young  
12 man of color, a foreign national young  
13 woman doing her best, putting me through  
14 the best education. I went up to  
15 Philippa Schuyler, by the way, a school  
16 for the gifted and talented, the school  
17 that Mos Def went to. Many of you know  
18 him. And yet and still, I threw all of  
19 that away.

20 I ran away from home from  
21 Brooklyn, New York to Philadelphia, PA a  
22 week short of completing the ninth grade.  
23 While in Philadelphia, I joined an  
24 organized crime syndicate, a gang, and  
25 for the next four months was holed up in

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2 four to five rowhouses, abandoned homes,  
3 dilapidated homes, selling cocaine out of  
4 those homes for the gang.

5 On September 19th in one of  
6 those houses a dreadful act took place.  
7 To put it in context, at certain times  
8 those of us who were working in the  
9 houses would be released or relieved to  
10 go to somewhere else to take showers,  
11 right, get cleaned up, relax, eat food,  
12 and then we would be put back in the  
13 houses to work. And at that time,  
14 September 19th, I had been in the house  
15 with my co-defendant and I, who I had ran  
16 away with. This was a childhood buddy  
17 who I had known from the second grade.  
18 We were classmates, and we ran away  
19 together. And we were in this house. We  
20 hadn't showered for a few days, and  
21 someone else came to the house, someone  
22 else who was working in the organization,  
23 and they were assigned with the  
24 responsibility of picking up money that  
25 was proceeds from the drug sales and

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2 dropping off new supplies of drugs.

3 One day when this individual,  
4 Anjo Pryce -- now I can say -- I can find  
5 the strength to say his name. For many  
6 years I was unable to say his name out of  
7 shame and regret and things like that.

8 When Anjo came to the house, an  
9 argument ensued and we questioned him  
10 about why, you know, he didn't bring food  
11 and when were we going to be able to  
12 shower, and he questioned us about  
13 missing money. That argument escalated  
14 into a physical scuffle between Anjo and  
15 my co-defendant, Dameon.

16 On the bed was a knife, what we  
17 call a Rambo knife, a survival knife, and  
18 the accessories -- it was called a  
19 survival knife because inside the handle  
20 were survival accessories, like fishing  
21 hooks and needles and thread and things  
22 of that nature and a compass, and the  
23 accessories laid around the knife. And  
24 as the scuffle ensued, I grabbed the  
25 knife. I did. And I entered the scuffle

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2 in a very, very brutal way. I stabbed  
3 Anjo. I stabbed him. And in that  
4 moment, you know, I became  
5 unrecognizable. I know I did.  
6 Unrecognizable to my mother. I was the  
7 worst person in that space. I know I was  
8 in hindsight, because I was the one who  
9 always had something to prove. I was the  
10 one who was always insecure, had to show  
11 that I wasn't a chump, had to show that  
12 no one was going to take advantage of me.  
13 I don't think that Anjo would have done  
14 the same to me. I don't think so. At  
15 least I'd like to believe that he  
16 wouldn't. Even though he was 17 years  
17 older than both me and Dameon at the  
18 time, in hindsight and as adult men, you  
19 know, he was a child too, you know. And  
20 then I would learn later that he was also  
21 a runaway from home. He ran away from  
22 Florida and left behind a loving family,  
23 just as I did and just as Dameon had did.  
24 In fact, the whole organization, the  
25 whole gang, everybody that was working in

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2 the houses were runaway children, not  
3 loving ourselves, not loving each other,  
4 you know, I guess being exploited.

5 Anjo's family was from Jamaica  
6 and he was born in Jamaica. My mother  
7 was from Trinidad. I was born in  
8 Trinidad. Dameon's father was from  
9 Barbados and his mother was from  
10 Trinidad. So the narrative, it was  
11 almost similar with our cases.

12 Anjo's mother left Jamaica to  
13 come over here to make a way for herself  
14 and her children. My mother left  
15 Trinidad at the age of 18 and I was two.  
16 She left me with my grandparents and my  
17 aunts and extended family to come over to  
18 America to make a way for herself and me  
19 to come too.

20 In hindsight, looking back at  
21 these things, you know, the cosmic  
22 implications of it, you know, it's not  
23 lost on me. I left a tear in the fabric  
24 of life, a hole in the cosmos, you know,  
25 that could never be filled, and that hole

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2 is Anjo Pryce and whatever purpose he was  
3 put on this earth to fulfill, you know.  
4 And perhaps we were all put on this earth  
5 to fulfill something. I believe  
6 everybody in this room is. But when we  
7 don't make choices, I've learned, when we  
8 make choices that are inconsistent with  
9 our potentials, with the things we're  
10 good at, we find ourselves on the  
11 downside of destiny. When we make  
12 choices with the things that we are good  
13 at with our potentials, then we can reach  
14 our highest destiny.

15 Anjo ran away from home,  
16 leaving an incomplete mural about  
17 American history. He was a fantastic  
18 artist. I actually saw some of his  
19 artwork in the houses, the crack houses  
20 that I worked in that he had worked in  
21 before me. You know, pictures, I mean,  
22 unbelievable, in its realism and its  
23 depth of perception, pictures of gorillas  
24 and flowers and tigers. I mean, so he  
25 even at a young age like that in a

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2 situation like that, in a drug  
3 organization, he had a connection to  
4 natural things, you know.

5 I left behind dreams of being  
6 an actor. Dameon left behind, you know,  
7 dreams of being a computer programmer.  
8 And one of the things that, you know,  
9 came to me as I would be in the privacy  
10 of my cell, pacing floors, you know,  
11 reading books, trying to understand how  
12 did I get here, how could I have done  
13 something like that, you know, that is so  
14 far removed from the seeds that were sewn  
15 into me by my family, by my grandmother,  
16 by my grandfather, by my mother. How  
17 could I have done that? You know, why  
18 did I do that?

19 I just read more, read more  
20 about violence, read more about socially  
21 toxic environments, read more about just  
22 human nature. It took me into studies of  
23 religion and philosophy and so on and so  
24 forth, and one of the things that guided  
25 me too was Anjo Pryce's father, Errol

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2 Pryce, a statement that he made that's  
3 well documented in the papers when he  
4 said, I feel no rage at these two young  
5 boys. As far as I'm concerned, they're  
6 just as innocent as Anjo. And I wondered  
7 why he said that about me and Dameon,  
8 because I know I wasn't innocent. You  
9 know, so it propelled me to study more  
10 about innocence and what that meant and  
11 how do young people, you know, do such  
12 heinous things. You know, where do we  
13 lose our innocence, and is it some kind  
14 of way that we could regain back that  
15 which we had lost in the act? Because  
16 you cannot take a life from somebody or  
17 take the humanity from somebody without  
18 losing your own in the process or maybe  
19 without being devoid of it from the  
20 beginning. And I don't believe that I  
21 was devoid of it.

22 To hear the testimonies today,  
23 I didn't know exactly how would I begin  
24 this conversation, this address to you,  
25 but to go after the testimonies that I



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2 went after, just to hear them about the  
3 lives that were lost and all the  
4 testimonies, just the weight of this  
5 moment right here, it just got so heavier  
6 and heavier and heavier for me. I'm so  
7 happy that we're beginning this  
8 conversation with these important  
9 questions, and the most important of  
10 which is why. That is the question that  
11 has to guide us. That's the question  
12 that I ask myself, because "why" points  
13 to a deeper level of analysis, "why"  
14 takes us to trying to understand the  
15 causes of these things and the roots of  
16 these things, because moral judgments is  
17 not an explanation. To say that the  
18 person did this because they're evil,  
19 it's not an explanation. You know, it's  
20 tautologous. It's almost like how  
21 Morielli, one of the characters in one of  
22 the ancient plays, they would talk about  
23 morphine and the question was why does  
24 morphine make people sleep? And the  
25 answer was because of its dormitive

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2 principles. And dormitive just means  
3 sleep inducing. So it makes people sleep  
4 because it's sleep inducing. That's not  
5 an answer. Or, you know, why is she  
6 dumb? In one of his other plays, why was  
7 the girl dumb? Because she couldn't  
8 speak. Well, why couldn't she speak?  
9 Because she lost her tongue. She lost  
10 the ability to operate her tongue. Well,  
11 why did she lose the ability to operate  
12 her tongue? That's what we're getting  
13 at.

14 And so it propelled me to look  
15 deeper into these issues, and I'm glad  
16 that we're asking this question why, and  
17 then the next question has to be, what  
18 are we to learn from this? What are we  
19 to learn from the violence in the streets  
20 and all of these deaths? And then the  
21 next question has to be, how are our  
22 realtime actions contributing to the  
23 issue as opposed to making it worse?

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: So I want to  
25 have to stop you, although I could listen

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2 to that "why" until we get an answer, but  
3 what I want to do is give other people an  
4 opportunity to add to what you said. And  
5 I appreciate you sharing this, because  
6 you didn't have to, and I appreciate the  
7 program. And there's a lot of why, and  
8 one of the answers to that is when you're  
9 15, you're not grown. You may think you  
10 are. You may say you are, but science  
11 says that your brain ain't developed  
12 until it's 24. And we can argue that,  
13 biological facts or more mature than  
14 others, but at least within our loss,  
15 you're not totally -- you're  
16 irresponsible, but there are mitigating  
17 circumstances to whatever you do. And I  
18 don't think that there are throwaway  
19 people. I do think that forgiveness is  
20 an important part within society.

21 So hold your thought. We're  
22 going to get some other thoughts on the  
23 record.

24 So can you say your name, bring  
25 the mic -- share the mic. State your

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2 name for the record and please begin your  
3 testimony.

4 MS. TODD: Yes. My name is  
5 Valerie Todd and I'm with Ms. Dorothy,  
6 Mothers in Charge. I kind of -- I was  
7 loving what you were saying about the  
8 pre-entry, and knowing Aleida, that was  
9 paralyzing as well. So to sit here and  
10 see, that was very paralyzing to hear,  
11 you know, about the unsolved murders and  
12 murder, period.

13 I kind of wanted to talk about  
14 the victimization, the re-victimization,  
15 and then having victims of your own,  
16 because I fall into all three of them  
17 categories, and the pre-entry is what  
18 really was like monumental, the game  
19 changer and world changer for me.

20 So being victimized, yes. You  
21 know, never met my biological father, was  
22 born addicted to heroin, sold to the  
23 black market, raised by my grandmother.  
24 I wasn't fortunate enough as him to have  
25 a mother who was teaching me integrity,

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2 ethics, responsibility, anything like  
3 that. My mother sold drugs, and I was  
4 always introduced to crime, violence of  
5 crime. I didn't even value humanity. I  
6 wasn't even taught to value humanity. So  
7 I went on to being victimized, the trauma  
8 of childhood abuse and neglect, verbal,  
9 sexual, physical, emotional, and  
10 spiritual, to end up having victims of my  
11 own crimes, because I started committing  
12 crimes, doing drugs, committing crimes  
13 myself. And, you know, like I said, I  
14 was like -- my mom told the judge in  
15 juvenile, Lock her up or lock me up,  
16 because she's a monster.

17 So nothing was really -- it  
18 wasn't about really what happened. It  
19 was I was just getting locked up.

20 So fast forward, you know,  
21 again, just the victim part, the  
22 re-victimization, and then also having  
23 victims myself of crimes. And then God  
24 first, he literally just met me in a jail  
25 cell, which I am so grateful and I will

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2 never -- my gratitude will never be  
3 silence to God, because -- and then  
4 Mothers in Charge, I have women from 2009  
5 coming in twice a week who had their  
6 children -- it was women whose children  
7 were killed in the streets of  
8 Philadelphia coming into the prison,  
9 trying to get to a solution, saying, you  
10 know, really every single -- two times a  
11 week saying to us, like unlearn and  
12 relearn, and that was like -- that was  
13 just like mind-boggling to me, because  
14 people do just assume that you know  
15 better, but it's not until you know  
16 better that you can do better, and that's  
17 what Mothers in Charge has really, really  
18 been for me. It was a pre-entry. Coming  
19 into the prison, teaching us 25 lessons  
20 of cognitive behavioral therapy, social  
21 skills, and problem-solving skills twice  
22 a week. And then after you're done your  
23 25 lessons, they're sending in again  
24 mothers whose children have been murdered  
25 by criminals. I'm a criminal in jail

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2 doing after care with me. And then when  
3 I went up to state prison, they stayed in  
4 contact with me and said, You need the  
5 proper supports when you come home,  
6 because obviously the family I came from  
7 or where I come from -- and that's no  
8 excuse. And that was another thing  
9 Mothers in Charge taught me. You're  
10 going to make excuses or make changes.  
11 And I said, you know, I wanted to make  
12 changes, and I started doing that inside  
13 the prison. I didn't wait until the  
14 gates opened and said, now I'm going to  
15 make changes. I stopped breaking rules  
16 in prison. I redirected everything. My  
17 character was changed, just everything.  
18 The stuff that you would think I would  
19 know, I didn't know. And these women are  
20 coming twice a week saying, You heal a  
21 woman, you will heal a nation. If you  
22 change the woman's thinking, you will  
23 change the woman. And it was true. It's  
24 true. To this day, what can I do? I can  
25 be the change that I want to see in this

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2 world.

3           You know, since I've been  
4 home -- I've been home since 2012 -- I  
5 came straight down to Ms. Dorothy's  
6 office, and she got a plan together,  
7 asked me what I needed, and employed me.  
8 And I've been employed with Mothers in  
9 Charge. I've been working -- I worked in  
10 the prisons for five years, you know, and  
11 we're still meeting the women when they  
12 come home, women and men, because we're  
13 doing the thinking for a change, the  
14 women working for a change, for life  
15 skills, self-esteem, job readiness,  
16 trauma-informed, mental health, first  
17 aid, storytelling. This is what we're  
18 doing as women are getting released and  
19 men so that to stop the recidivism, to  
20 stop -- just like Wilfredo, what he said  
21 of having the anger management. Yeah,  
22 it's a real life issue, not just for the  
23 people who is incarcerated, for everybody  
24 on earth. Anger management is real, real  
25 life. You know, what do you do with it?



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2 And these are the things that I'm doing  
3 every single day. Every single day my  
4 life is going to be a big fat thank you  
5 for Mothers in Charge, who came inside  
6 the prison pre-entry, yes, pre-entry and  
7 then reentry, and then the after care and  
8 the proper supports I need every single  
9 day are standing right there, holding my  
10 hand, lifting me up, helping me hold  
11 somebody else's hand and lift somebody  
12 else up.

13 That's it.

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

15 I'm glad we went that way, so I can hear  
16 that.

17 MS. JOHNSON-SPEIGHT: Good  
18 morning. My name is Dorothy  
19 Johnson-Speight and I'm Founder and  
20 Executive Director of Mothers in Charge.  
21 I want to, first of all, thank the  
22 Committee for this hearing and this  
23 opportunity to give testimony.

24 Can I just ask a question? How  
25 many of you are moms or dads that are on

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2 the panel?

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: Moms or  
4 dads?

5 MS. JOHNSON-SPEIGHT: Moms or  
6 dads. That means you have a son or  
7 daughter.

8 Thank you. I want to, first of  
9 all, thank Aleida and all of the women  
10 that are here that gave testimony this  
11 morning, all of the women and men that  
12 are on the front lines working every  
13 single day. To have to bury a son or  
14 daughter is the worst pain in the world  
15 and especially when someone has taken  
16 your son's or daughter's life.

17 In May of 2003, I brought some  
18 people together, and some of them are in  
19 this room, at Zion Baptist Church for the  
20 first meeting of Mothers in Charge in May  
21 of 2003. I had met a lot of these  
22 mothers prior to that time and knew the  
23 tragedy that they had lived with the  
24 death of their son or daughter. I knew  
25 them because I had started a group called

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2 Compassionate Friends, because my  
3 two-and-a-half-year-old daughter had died  
4 of bacterial meningitis. So I had met  
5 mothers who had come to Compassionate  
6 Friends, and this was the first African  
7 American chapter of Compassionate Friends  
8 that I started at Temple University  
9 Hospital. And I met with so many moms  
10 who had lost children, and my prayer was  
11 always, please keep my son safe. He was  
12 about nine years old then. And I would  
13 drag him to the meetings of Compassionate  
14 Friends and meet these moms who had lost  
15 children, and it was heartbreaking to see  
16 them, but little did I know that I would  
17 get that same call in 2001 on a cold  
18 night in December.

19 I got the call to come to  
20 Einstein Hospital quick, that my son, my  
21 24-year-old son, Khaaliq Jabbar Johnson,  
22 had been shot and killed. I went there,  
23 and I didn't think I could live. In  
24 fact, I didn't even want to live. I was  
25 just beginning to live with the fact that

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2 my daughter had died and now I've got to  
3 live with the fact that my second, my  
4 only two biological children, are gone.

5 It's the worst pain in the  
6 world. It's the pain you wake up with in  
7 the morning and it's the pain you go to  
8 bed with at night, and if you're a  
9 parent, if you've lost a child, you  
10 understand that pain, and there are many  
11 of them in the room that do today. But  
12 we shouldn't have to. Homicides  
13 shouldn't be the leading cause of death  
14 among African American males 14 to 34,  
15 but it is across this country. What do  
16 we do?

17 So Mothers in Charge was  
18 started, as I said, in 2003. What I  
19 found out in 2001 -- actually, it was  
20 2002, a month after Khaaliq was murdered,  
21 that there was another woman by the name  
22 of Ruth Donnelly who I saw on Crime  
23 Stoppers asking for someone to come  
24 forward with the information that they  
25 had about her 19-year-old son who was

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2 murdered in July of 2001, come forward  
3 with that information. And I saw her on  
4 Crime Stoppers and one of the things that  
5 she said, that he was seen running from  
6 the scene of a crime with a black pitbull  
7 running behind him. Now, this is a month  
8 after Khaaliq is murdered. And I'm  
9 sitting watching this, my stepson and I,  
10 and I'm like, the person who killed  
11 Khaaliq lived two blocks from where her  
12 son was murdered. I have a picture.

13 So I went to the scene where I  
14 saw this lady standing on the porch on  
15 Channel 6 News, Crime Stoppers, and I  
16 asked the man that was there that the  
17 woman who gave that interview, could I  
18 meet with her. And sure enough he  
19 directed me where she lived on Chew  
20 Avenue, and I went around. And Ruth  
21 Donnelly and I sat down at her dining  
22 room table and found out that the same  
23 person that murdered her son in July  
24 murdered my son in December.

25 Ruth Donnelly was somebody that

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2 I probably would not have met, a white  
3 lady living in Olney. Our paths probably  
4 would have never crossed, but we were  
5 joined at the hip that day when I sat at  
6 her dining room table and found out that  
7 the person who murdered her son, five  
8 months later, two blocks away, my son was  
9 murdered. They were one and the same  
10 person.

11 This is the criminal history of  
12 the person that was found guilty of  
13 murdering our children, Ernest Odom.

14 It's about 11 pages long of all of the  
15 charges that he had on him from the age  
16 of 16 to the age of 26 when he murdered  
17 both our children, long criminal history.  
18 And to be honest with you, I was very  
19 angry.

20 We went through two hearings,  
21 two trials, two murder trials, and he was  
22 found guilty of first-degree murder in  
23 both trials, and he's serving two life  
24 sentences. It doesn't bring back our  
25 children, but glad that he's off the

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2 street so he doesn't kill anyone else.

3 But the thing that I have  
4 learned on my journey of healing -- and  
5 it's been a journey that no one should  
6 have to travel -- I used to didn't care  
7 like about his childhood or what happened  
8 to him, you know. He killed my son. But  
9 on my healing journey, I've learned not  
10 to ask what was wrong with him, but what  
11 happened to him. What happened to him  
12 that he could take the lives of two young  
13 men that -- he didn't know them. He knew  
14 nothing about them. It was an argument  
15 over a parking space for my son, and he  
16 shot him seven times. What happened to  
17 him in his life? We talk about trauma,  
18 the importance of understanding trauma  
19 and the healing that our community needs.  
20 We're losing on both sides.

21 Now, he's been -- he was 26  
22 when he went away. Maybe he'll live to  
23 80, so he's going to be there about maybe  
24 50 years or more, you know. We've got to  
25 pay for him. We got to pay for the room

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2 and board. And I have the cost here.

3 Like what does it cost to house an

4 inmate? So looking at security and

5 administration, it amounts to about

6 23,000 per year per inmate. For medical

7 care, maybe \$8,760 for medical care.

8 Operation costs, 7,000, and it goes on.

9 This is the cost of violence. This is

10 the cost that we're paying. Why can't

11 these dollars be spent for prevention?

12 (Applause.)

13 MS. JOHNSON-SPEIGHT: Maybe had

14 these dollars been spent for prevention,

15 my son, Ruth's son, and so many other

16 sons would still be here.

17 My son was 24 years old. He

18 was a TSS worker at Pickett Middle

19 School. He loved working with children.

20 He loved working with children. Talk

21 about lost dreams? Our dream was that he

22 would go back and get his Master's Degree

23 and I would get my Doctoral Degree and we

24 should hang our shingle and work with

25 children at risk, because that's what I



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2 did before Mothers in Charge. I was a  
3 supervisor at Comhar working with mental  
4 health diagnosis, children with mental  
5 health diagnosis, not knowing that one  
6 day a child with a mental health  
7 diagnosis would take my son's life.

8 We've got to look at the  
9 healing that our community needs. We've  
10 got to look at how we spend these  
11 dollars. It doesn't take a rocket  
12 scientist to figure out that it would be  
13 more beneficial to spend money on  
14 prevention than housing an inmate.

15 I served on the Philadelphia  
16 Prison Board almost ten years now, eight  
17 years under Michael Nutter. Now I've  
18 been reassigned to the Prison Board.  
19 I've seen these young men come in, and it  
20 hurts my heart, because they're all our  
21 sons. I see 14- and 15- and 16-year-olds  
22 when we were working at the House of  
23 Correction with the juveniles coming in  
24 who had committed a serious crime, armed  
25 robbery, murder, attempted murder. And

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2 they had not a clue. They thought they  
3 was going to go with their mom and have  
4 McDonald's and everything was going to be  
5 okay. They had no clue in terms of what  
6 they had done and what the consequence  
7 was going to be at 15 and 16 years old.  
8 What happened to them? They weren't born  
9 with guns in their hands. But we pay the  
10 ultimate price for this.

11 I want my son to be here today.  
12 I want him to be doing what he wanted to  
13 do, saving the lives of children that  
14 were at risk. Now, he got accepted into  
15 Lincoln's Master Program right before he  
16 was murdered. He was going to go get his  
17 Master's Degree. Here I am now almost 80  
18 years old in a Doctoral Program, because  
19 that's what we wanted to do. And I'm  
20 doing it for him, for his life and for  
21 his death, to continue to make a  
22 difference in the lives of children so  
23 that mothers don't have to continue to  
24 come to us because they had to bury a son  
25 or daughter.

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2 Fifteen years I've been at  
3 this, 15 years, with little support. I'm  
4 going to be straight up. With little  
5 support. But every week we open our  
6 doors for mothers, and a lot of the  
7 mothers have come that are here for grief  
8 support. No charge. Valerie teaches  
9 anger management twice a day on  
10 Thursdays.

11 For how long now?

12 MS. TODD: Four years.

13 MS. JOHNSON-SPEIGHT: Four  
14 years. No support. We get referrals  
15 from the courts and from the judges and  
16 everybody, because people are angry and  
17 they don't know how to manage that anger.  
18 And everybody that dies doesn't die  
19 because somebody is selling drugs.  
20 They're angry and out of control. They  
21 die because they're angry and they're on  
22 Facebook and they want to act on that  
23 anger. Or a parking space, they want to  
24 act on that anger.

25 There are things that we need

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2 to be putting our money into that will  
3 prevent a lot of the things that we're  
4 seeing in this city, and nobody wants to  
5 do that. We aren't funded for anger  
6 management, but we do it every single  
7 Thursday and we have 15 to 16 people  
8 coming every session for nine sessions,  
9 then they get a certificate and they take  
10 back to their judge. And I heard a young  
11 man say the other day -- I sat in the  
12 back of the room and I listened to these  
13 stories of the folks who are coming to  
14 anger management. And he said, I was  
15 taking my daughter back to Mansfield  
16 College, my brother and I, and we got  
17 into a road rage thing. My brother  
18 wanted to stop the car, get out and  
19 attack the guy, you know. They wanted  
20 to -- I said -- he said, had it not been  
21 for anger management, the tools that I'm  
22 getting in this session that I've been  
23 coming to for the last three or four  
24 weeks, I may have gotten out the car and  
25 killed that person right in front of my

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2 daughter on the way to college, taking  
3 her up to Mansfield College.

4 But that's the thing that I'm  
5 talking about. People don't know how to  
6 manage. If they knew better, they would  
7 oftentimes do better. But if no one has  
8 taught them and there's no place for them  
9 to go to get that information, then they  
10 keep continuing to do what they do and we  
11 continue to keep paying the price for it.

12 I went really off script. I  
13 mean, I had wrote some things I really,  
14 really wanted to say.

15 Kudos to the new DA for caring  
16 enough about victims to appoint someone  
17 like Movita to that job.

18 (Applause.)

19 MS. JOHNSON-SPEIGHT: I  
20 remember when my son was murdered, I kept  
21 thinking somebody is going to come knock  
22 on the door and say, I'm sorry, what can  
23 I do to help. Because after all, he was  
24 a working, productive citizen in the City  
25 of Philadelphia, was murdered in the City

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2 of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection.  
3 But no one came and offered help. We had  
4 to figure it out on our own. But now we  
5 have someone in a position that can  
6 support victims.

7 We need support. This is no  
8 easy task getting up every day when you  
9 had to bury a son or daughter or combing  
10 your hair, brushing your teeth. You  
11 think it's just easy just to do that?  
12 It's not easy to do that anymore when  
13 you've had to bury your loved one,  
14 someone you gave birth to or, in other  
15 cases, someone who was your brother or  
16 your sister or your husband. It's  
17 painful when someone takes a life of  
18 someone else. And I never really  
19 understood that.

20 I had a woman tell me, It's  
21 different when you lose a child to  
22 homicide or lose a loved one. Her mother  
23 was murdered. Or when you lose someone  
24 to natural death. And I argued with her,  
25 because I thought there's no right way to

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2 lose a child. I lost my daughter at two  
3 and a half and I lost my son at 24. I  
4 loved them both, but the thing that is  
5 different when it's a homicide, it's  
6 complicated grief. You got to deal with  
7 the criminal justice system. You got to  
8 deal with the police, whether they answer  
9 your call or whether they don't or  
10 whether the case gets solved. You got to  
11 deal with so many other aspects of a  
12 homicide that you don't have to deal with  
13 when it's a natural cause. So we need  
14 that extra support, and thank you,  
15 Mr. DA, for providing that support to  
16 victims now.

17 No one came and said, What can  
18 I do for you? Your son was murdered.  
19 What do you need? I had to be the  
20 vehicle that made that happen. Mothers  
21 in Charge was the vehicle that kept me  
22 breathing, because I helped somebody else  
23 breathe, because I helped someone else  
24 live when they thought they couldn't.

25 To bury a son or daughter is

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2 the worst pain in the world. And today  
3 homicide is the leading cause of death.  
4 It's not accidents, not car accidents.  
5 It's not some incurable disease. In this  
6 city and across the country, it's a  
7 national health epidemic. It's the  
8 leading cause of death among African  
9 Americans 14 to 34, and we act like it's  
10 okay. Well, it's not okay, and we should  
11 be ashamed that we're not doing more.

12 I'm going to stop there,  
13 because maybe there's some questions or  
14 some other thoughts and some other people  
15 want to give testimony as well. But I  
16 want you to feel what I feel. There's no  
17 pain like this pain in the world, and I  
18 hope none of you ever have to experience  
19 it.

20 Thank you.

21 (Applause.)

22 JUDGE DeLEON: You know,  
23 Dorothy, programs that -- the program  
24 that you founded and that you have been  
25 pushing so hard I'm sure has been



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2 responsible for lessening homicides. I  
3 know that if you did not teach those life  
4 skills that you've been teaching, that  
5 more people would be dead right now, and  
6 a program like yours needs to be  
7 expanded, because you're on the right  
8 track and I applaud you for your work.

9 MS. JOHNSON-SPEIGHT: Thank  
10 you.

11 (Applause.)

12 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: I just want  
13 to say I work with Ms. Johnson  
14 specifically as well as her staff and the  
15 people that she works with. I have never  
16 seen transformations in people's minds  
17 and thoughts and behaviors like I've seen  
18 through this program. I'm sure there are  
19 other programs out there that do the  
20 same, but I will say, this is effective.  
21 And we're talking about where we need to  
22 put our dollars in effective programming,  
23 I have worked specifically and personally  
24 with Mothers in Charge and saw the  
25 difference. I used to see mothers,

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2 women, go through our system five, six,  
3 seven, eight times with more time on  
4 their hands, becoming more desperate, but  
5 when I see what you did with these women  
6 reunited and with their family, taught  
7 them to forgive themselves, that was  
8 first and foremost.

9 And I think, Kempis, you talked  
10 about that too, forgiving yourself,  
11 recognizing yourself, but also  
12 recognizing why. When you have that  
13 answer, I hope you are able to join with  
14 some people to use it. Now, you may have  
15 that answer, but I hope that you are able  
16 to help us recognize those kids where ego  
17 and, you know, their pride is bigger than  
18 the value of human life, because what you  
19 said I think people would think -- would  
20 scratch their head and say, well, if you  
21 came from a good family and if you had a  
22 good education, then what can we do for  
23 that? It's easier to recognize when  
24 people don't come from that and have  
25 those issues. It's easier for that, and

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2 we don't do the best job at doing that  
3 either, but how do we get to those kids  
4 that we don't even know where they're  
5 struggling? And maybe you can help  
6 figure that out, because it's that --  
7 what I see when we sit on the other end  
8 of someone who has been charged with  
9 murder, they have their hands in their  
10 head and they're crying like a baby, and  
11 I know that's not what they were doing  
12 when they committed that act, but what  
13 changed? What made that possible?  
14 That's the question that I hope we get  
15 to.

16 But I will say this with the  
17 District Attorney, I am happy that you  
18 are here and you're fulfilling your  
19 vision. I would say that my office has  
20 tried to work with young kids who have  
21 decided to pick up a gun for the first  
22 time because they saw something that was  
23 scary or they felt threatened. They  
24 didn't use it yet. And when they got  
25 tagged by the District Attorney's Office,

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2 we would try to look for organizations  
3 such as CeaseFire here or people that  
4 could have some understanding of what  
5 that kid is struggling with and give that  
6 kid some better options, and we were told  
7 we don't want those kids to mix with  
8 prior felons, but they were okay with  
9 them going in a jail with adults and  
10 learning worse behaviors, getting worse  
11 mentoring. And I would just hope that we  
12 bring some common sense to that approach.  
13 When we identify these kids, don't let  
14 them rot in a jail because it's a  
15 political crime such as picking up a gun,  
16 but allow them to be mentored, not just  
17 ignore their action but allow them to be  
18 mentored positively and taking positive  
19 steps versus that senseless, nonsensical  
20 reaction to just pick up a gun. Because  
21 if they pick it up, they're going to use  
22 it.

23 MS. JOHNSON-SPEIGHT: And  
24 that's key. Mentoring is so very  
25 important. We have on our website,

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2 Mothers in Charge, All Our -- it's called  
3 All Our Sons, and we did an interview  
4 inside the prison with a young man who  
5 talked about getting a gun when he was  
6 nine years old and how that made him feel  
7 so powerful, you know. We've got to find  
8 a way to address that, you know, through  
9 mentoring, through education, through all  
10 kinds of things to support them.

11 You know, a gun shouldn't make  
12 a young man feel powerful. Maybe a book  
13 or some education should make him feel  
14 powerful, and that's what we have to  
15 address early on.

16 COUNCILMAN JONES: So I'm  
17 encouraged by the moon, the sun, and the  
18 stars aligning to get us to this point  
19 right here. You've started at a  
20 different point. I started as a  
21 legislator at a different point. I have  
22 a defense attorney. I have a district  
23 attorney. All of us are coming to this  
24 same place. And one of the things I was  
25 encouraged in a conversation with our new

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2 District Attorney about something that I,  
3 quite frankly, hadn't heard before, but  
4 the cost accounting end of some of this  
5 criminal justice stuff that he keenly  
6 like wants to focus on.

7 And you mentioned  
8 re-prioritizing dollars to do pre-entry  
9 versus reentry and getting to solve the  
10 why, if I would.

11 Well, one of the steps that  
12 jumped in my head because of one of our  
13 guests in the audience, they gave me a  
14 statistic about where the money was and  
15 how, because everybody -- many of my  
16 colleagues believe that we have to  
17 appropriate all of this money just to  
18 stave off some of the behavior that we  
19 have, but really when you start to cost  
20 account some of this stuff, there was one  
21 block in my district that is the  
22 million-dollar block that because of the  
23 way we're doing things, criminal justice,  
24 that one block cost all of you \$1 million  
25 a year. If you multiply that by all of

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2 the blocks that this happens on and then  
3 redirecting, you got to make some tough  
4 decisions. Some stuff feels good, but it  
5 might not be working. Reappropriate some  
6 money to things that are proven  
7 data-driven solutions. We may have to  
8 make those kinds of adjustments, but if  
9 we do, we then pre-entry, prevent, and  
10 answer the why. Because if we keep doing  
11 what we're doing, we're going to keep  
12 getting the same result.

13 And so I'm encouraged about the  
14 configuration of folk and from the victim  
15 and the other victim perspective of this  
16 as you articulated, and we're going to  
17 try to get to the why and we're going to  
18 try to do what we can to incrementally  
19 move the needle in the right direction.  
20 I'm encouraged by these acts. I'm a  
21 little uncomfortable sometimes being in a  
22 room where the DA and the defense  
23 attorneys get along. That's a little --  
24 that's something new, but I'm encouraged  
25 about what can come of it.

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2 MS. JOHNSON-SPEIGHT:

3 Absolutely. Got to all work together on  
4 it.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: Can we read  
6 the --

7 MR. ROJAS: Can I ask the young  
8 man a question?

9 At what point did you actually  
10 express some remorse for your actions or  
11 accepted your action?

12 MR. SONGSTER: A specific date  
13 and time I cannot say. I think it was  
14 gradually. I think it happened in  
15 solitary confinement. And this is  
16 definitely not to make a case for  
17 solitary confinement, because who I am  
18 today is not because of prison or  
19 solitary confinement but in spite of it.  
20 But it was that moment of -- in those  
21 moments of solitude, you know, having  
22 conversations with myself, interrogating  
23 myself, you know, learning more about the  
24 value of human life and just the value of  
25 life, period, and just growing up, just



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2 growing, just maturing, you know, and  
3 being able to conjure up the face of Anjo  
4 Pryce again and look him in the face in  
5 my mind and say to him, Sorry, man. I'm  
6 really sorry, man, and I wish I could  
7 bring you back. Being able to do that.

8           You know, it took some time.  
9 It took some time, and it took courage.  
10 And I learned that real courage is not  
11 being afraid of yourself, you know. So  
12 it took the ability to face myself, what  
13 I have done, those drawbacks in myself  
14 that made me capable of doing that and  
15 addressing that.

16           Those inner demons, you know, I  
17 had to retrace my life and find out where  
18 they were born, you know. And I know  
19 where a lot of them were born, you know.  
20 I didn't want to speak about them here  
21 today, especially after the testimonies  
22 that I heard, because the last thing I  
23 wanted to sound like is if I'm making  
24 excuses for what I've done, right?

25           But I think that answering the

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2 question of why or giving explanations is  
3 not necessarily an excuse. You know,  
4 avoiding terms like "evil" and "guilt"  
5 and "crime" is not necessarily making an  
6 excuse or being soft on crime any more  
7 than a doctor, you know, is not soft on  
8 cancer, but not condemning cancer or not  
9 using moral judgments against cancer.  
10 Forgiveness and condemnation is  
11 irrelevant to a doctor, but that doesn't  
12 mean that they don't fight just as hard  
13 against cancer, you know.

14 And so one of the things too I  
15 realized was that I was not that  
16 15-year-old boy anymore. Once I started  
17 to learn more about the difference  
18 between adulthood and childhood, right,  
19 reading in the Bible where it said that  
20 in First Corinthians, Chapter 13, Verse  
21 11, I believe it is: When I was a child,  
22 I spoke as a child. I understood as a  
23 child. I thought as a child. But when I  
24 became a man, I put away childish things.  
25 And when I read where Aristotle spoke

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2 about the nature of adolescence and it  
3 made me look at myself and how I was  
4 thinking, when he talked about -- he said  
5 2,500 years ago in terms of their  
6 character, the young are prone to desires  
7 and inclined to do whatever they desire,  
8 and they are impulsive and quick-tempered  
9 and inclined to follow up their anger by  
10 action. And they are unable to resist  
11 their impulses, for through love of honor  
12 they cannot put up with being belittled,  
13 but become indignant if they think they  
14 are done or wronged. And though they  
15 love honor, they love victory more, for  
16 youth longs for superiority, and victory  
17 is a kind of superiority. And they are  
18 filled with good hopes, for like those  
19 drinking wine, the young are heated by  
20 their nature, and at the same time, they  
21 are filled with good hopes because of not  
22 yet having experienced much failure. And  
23 they live for the most part in hope, for  
24 hope is for the future and memory is of  
25 what has gone by. But for the young, the

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2 future is long and the past short, for in  
3 the dawn of life, nothing can be  
4 remembered and everything can be hoped  
5 for.

6 COUNCILMAN JONES: So I'm going  
7 to stop you right now. I'm a Plato kind  
8 of guy, but I'll do Aristotle, and I  
9 think it's appropriate in the subject  
10 matter today.

11 We're at 2 of 12:00. Does the  
12 stenographer need a break?

13 COURT STENOGRAPHER: I'm okay.

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: If she's  
15 good, we're good. Sometimes she can't  
16 get a break.

17 So what I'm going to do is ask  
18 you to stay. Thank you for what you  
19 shared, all of you. And I must have  
20 heard you a dozen times, and each time it  
21 just touches something. You speak for a  
22 lot of the voices that sometimes you walk  
23 by every day and they suffer silently.  
24 So I'm thankful for you.

25 Ms. Williams, can you read the

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2 next group to testify.

3 Thank you, guys.

4 THE CLERK: Movita

5 Johnson-Harrell and Jeffrey Blystone.

6 (Witnesses approached witness  
7 table.)

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,  
9 guys, for your patience, and it's now  
10 good afternoon instead of good morning.  
11 Just a reminder, state your name for the  
12 record and your title, if that is  
13 appropriate, and begin your testimony.  
14 We'll start with you, Ms. Harrell.

15 MS. JOHNSON-HARRELL: Good  
16 afternoon. My name is Movita  
17 Johnson-Harrell. I am the newly  
18 appointed interim supervisor for Victim  
19 Witness Services for the District  
20 Attorney's Office. I am also the Founder  
21 of an organization called the CHARLES  
22 Foundation. Charles is an acronym for  
23 Creating Healthy Alternatives Results in  
24 Less Emotional Suffering.

25 I have been exposed to homicide

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2 all my life. March 30th, 1975, 21 days  
3 before my ninth birthday, my father was  
4 murdered in front of me. The last vision  
5 I have of my father alive was me dressed  
6 in my pretty little pink two-piece and  
7 blood splattering all over it.

8           Some years later, July the 1st,  
9 1991, my only brother was murdered over a  
10 girl while his five-year-old son sat in  
11 his lap. And as I tried to recover from  
12 these two homicides, because as the -- I  
13 want to thank everyone that testified  
14 before me. Homicide is devastating to a  
15 family.

16           The night that my father was  
17 murdered, I lost both my mother and my  
18 father, because my mother sunk into a  
19 deep depression and to an issue with  
20 substance abuse, and I had to grow up  
21 very, very quickly, because I had a  
22 four-year-old sister that I had to take  
23 care of. So as I attempted to survive my  
24 father's homicide and then my brother's  
25 homicide, I spent my adult years

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2 protecting my four children.

3 In the summer of 2007, my  
4 children were 14, 15, 16, and my oldest  
5 was 20. She was up at the University of  
6 Maryland working on her Master's Degree.  
7 And my two sons came to me. They were 14  
8 and 16. And up to this point, you know,  
9 there's always that house in the  
10 neighborhood where all the kids go. We  
11 were that house. We kept Fruit Roll-Ups  
12 in the cabinet and juice boxes in the  
13 refrigerator and we had the big yard with  
14 the basketball court. My sons fixed  
15 electronics and bikes. So we were where  
16 all the kids came. And I made a  
17 conscious decision at that time to stay  
18 in that neighborhood where I was raised  
19 in Southwest Philadelphia because we were  
20 that family.

21 And my sons came to me and they  
22 said, Mom, we know nine boys killed in  
23 this neighborhood. And I turned to my  
24 husband and I said, It's time to go. I  
25 said, My black sons will not become

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2 statistics on the streets of  
3 Philadelphia. And I packed my family up  
4 and on January 15th, 2008, I moved my  
5 family to Lansdowne, Delaware County and  
6 I turned to my husband and I said, We're  
7 safe. And I went on about the business  
8 of living my life and raising my  
9 children.

10 And on January 12th, 2011,  
11 about 7:15 that evening, all the children  
12 that were home filed into the bedroom,  
13 and I looked at my husband and said, Why  
14 are we having a family moment? And  
15 everybody laughed. And at this time, my  
16 children were 18, 19, 20, and 24. And my  
17 son Charles was 18 years old. He was six  
18 feet tall, and he stood by my bedside and  
19 something whispered in my ear, get off  
20 the bed and hug your son. And I got off  
21 the bed and I wrapped my arms around my  
22 son and I kissed his neck and I said,  
23 Charles Johnson, do you know how much  
24 your mommy loves you? And he squealed  
25 like a little kid.



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2 Me and my husband do a lot of  
3 community service and we went out that  
4 night and did what we do, and we came  
5 back in and my house was quiet. And I  
6 went to bed at 10:00 p.m. like I usually  
7 do, and I sat up in my bed at 10:30 and I  
8 called my son's cell phone, and it went  
9 to voicemail. And I called my daughter's  
10 cell phone, and it went to voicemail. So  
11 I then called my daughter's best friend,  
12 because I had just bought my daughter her  
13 first car. I said, Tell Charlene to get  
14 the car home or she'll never drive it  
15 again. And I laid back down.

16 And at 11:20 my phone rang and  
17 I saw that it was my son Dante, and he's  
18 at work. We have a family business. We  
19 care for people with chronic mental  
20 illness and intellectual disabilities.  
21 And I'm saying, something happened at  
22 work, and I pick up the phone. And it's  
23 my son Dante and he's crying in the phone  
24 and it sounds like he's having a panic  
25 attack. And I'm saying, Breathe, Dante.

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2 Just breathe. And in a whisper, he says,  
3 Mom, Chuck got shot. He says, He's at  
4 Einstein Hospital and he's in the  
5 surgery. Mom, you got to get to the  
6 hospital, mom.

7 And I get to the hospital, and  
8 my son is in surgery. And I sat there  
9 what would seem to go on forever. And at  
10 some point, the doctors came downstairs,  
11 and I'm begging them to let me see my  
12 son. And they said, Mrs. Harrell, your  
13 son didn't make it. I was really  
14 surprised my feet and my knees didn't go  
15 out from under me.

16 So I begged them to let me see  
17 my son, and they took me upstairs to a  
18 room that was all sterling silver. In  
19 the middle of the room on a slab in a  
20 white body bag zipped up to the neck was  
21 my 18-year-old son. And they said, You  
22 can't touch him because it's a homicide  
23 investigation. And I begged them, I  
24 said, Please, I got to kiss my son. So I  
25 went around this table that seemed to go

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2 on forever and I got to my son's right  
3 ear and I called the call to prayer and I  
4 recited the Al-Fatihah like I did when he  
5 was born and I kissed his neck and I  
6 said, Charles Johnson, do you know how  
7 much your mommy loves you? And they  
8 zipped up the bag.

9 And I later found out that my  
10 18-year-old son was murdered in a case of  
11 mistaken identity. Two boys had a beef  
12 over a girl. They thought my son was the  
13 boy coming back to retaliate, when in  
14 fact my son didn't even know these  
15 people.

16 So my story is a little  
17 different from some of the other  
18 survivors' stories, because I had two  
19 amazing homicide detectives, and they  
20 kept saying, Movita, we're going to catch  
21 them. Movita, we're going to catch them.  
22 Movita, we're going to catch them. But  
23 what they said to me, While Charles is an  
24 innocent victim, these boys were going to  
25 kill somebody.

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2 So I said to them, What do you  
3 mean these boys were going to kill  
4 somebody?

5 They said, Well, they had  
6 juvenile records. They had adult  
7 records.

8 And what I said was, Why didn't  
9 anybody fix them? Why didn't anybody do  
10 anything if they knew that these boys  
11 were going to kill somebody? And the  
12 next thing I said was, We failed them.  
13 We as a society failed them.

14 So I told you I left  
15 Philadelphia January 15th, 2008. I  
16 buried Charles Johnson January 15th,  
17 2011. Exactly three years to the day  
18 that I left I put my 18-year-old son in  
19 the ground.

20 And then I went on to have a  
21 homicide trial, and I had a two-week  
22 trial where I had to sit -- and, first of  
23 all, I had to sit on the same floor with  
24 the two families of the boy who was  
25 responsible for murdering my son. That's

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2 the first thing that went terribly wrong  
3 after losing my son. But then I sat  
4 through this two-week trial where I got  
5 to hear about these boys and the lives  
6 that they lived and how they were raised  
7 and how they have been in facilities and  
8 how no one helped them and how they were  
9 products of a broken system.

10 So when we talk about criminal  
11 justice reform, we have to talk about  
12 some other reform. We need to talk about  
13 some educational reform. We need to talk  
14 about some economical reform. We need to  
15 talk about housing reform. We need to  
16 talk about food deserts. We need to talk  
17 about creating a holistic system that's  
18 going to help these young people.

19 (Applause.)

20 MS. JOHNSON-HARRELL: So at my  
21 trial, I actually asked for mercy for my  
22 son's killers. And I went to my family  
23 before I even asked the judge, and they  
24 didn't agree, but they allowed me to.  
25 And I was convicted to ask for mercy for

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2 these two boys because I saw as a society  
3 we failed these boys. So the one boy got  
4 life in prison without the possibility of  
5 parole and the second young man the judge  
6 was going to give 24 to 40 years, plus  
7 two gun charges that carried seven years  
8 a piece, but because I asked for mercy,  
9 she gave him 12 to 24 years and dropped  
10 the two gun charges. And the only thing  
11 that I asked of these two young men was,  
12 Anybody coming behind you, help them to  
13 leave better than they came in. Anybody  
14 that you come in contact with, help them  
15 to come out better. That's the only  
16 thing I asked.

17 So I feel very, very honored  
18 and very privileged to be the first  
19 homicide survivor to sit in the seat of  
20 Victim Services. I take it very, very  
21 seriously. I didn't need a job when I  
22 was offered this job, but what I saw was,  
23 I saw it as an opportunity to help fix a  
24 broken system that does not -- because I  
25 really did not get the help that I need

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2 from Victim Services. I really need to  
3 say that. I was so busy trying to --

4 (Applause.)

5 MS. JOHNSON-HARRELL: -- trying  
6 to make sure that my family was okay,  
7 because I had a daughter who blamed  
8 herself for her brother's death. I got a  
9 26-year-old daughter that suffers from  
10 severe survivor's remorse as a result of  
11 her brother coming to pick her up from  
12 Germantown.

13 So I was not helped by the  
14 system that was supposed to help me. I  
15 had to create my own help. And we know  
16 everybody doesn't have the opportunity to  
17 do that, so when we look at Victim  
18 Services, we need to be making sure that  
19 we're speaking for victims, but also if  
20 you heard, my new title is Victim Witness  
21 Services and Restorative Justice.

22 I have my counterpart -- Jody,  
23 could you stand up -- Jody Dodd here.  
24 Jody Dodd is our new restorative justice  
25 facilitator.

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2 (Applause.)

3 MS. JOHNSON-HARRELL: The  
4 mothers that are here that have not  
5 received reconciliation, they cannot  
6 fathom forgiving somebody because their  
7 murders have not been caught yet. So we  
8 need to fix the clearance rate. That's  
9 number one. But then we need to give  
10 survivors the opportunity to speak their  
11 truth. We need to give them the  
12 opportunity to be able to talk to their  
13 offenders, and then maybe we can come  
14 together to create some real solutions to  
15 keep this from happening over and over  
16 and over again.

17 I agree with Dorothy.

18 Everything Dorothy said I agree with, but  
19 one thing that I understand, being a  
20 victim, I no longer see myself as a  
21 victim. But being in a space where I  
22 have been invited to the table to raise  
23 the voice of the victim, we cannot have  
24 people making decisions for victims if  
25 you do not include them at the equation.



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2 (Applause.)

3 MS. JOHNSON-HARRELL: So if  
4 we're going to have true restorative  
5 justice, we need to raise the voice of  
6 the victims.

7 We've looked at the data from  
8 the Vera Institute and the data from  
9 Crime Survivors for Social Justice, and  
10 if you read the data, it tells you, more  
11 times than not, survivors want justice.  
12 They want to know why. They want to know  
13 the circumstances. They don't always  
14 want punitive consequences for their  
15 offenders, but if we don't include them  
16 in the conversation, we won't know. So  
17 we have to make sure that we're raising  
18 the voice of the victims, but we also  
19 have to make sure that as a community and  
20 as a society, we're reducing homicide and  
21 crime overall.

22 Thank you.

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: Just before  
25 we move on, there was an article about

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2 Philadelphia victims not receiving  
3 compensation from the state because of a  
4 loophole that said your child, your son  
5 or daughter was involved in some type of  
6 violence. What was that?

7 MR. BLYSTONE: Are you asking  
8 me?

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: I'm asking  
10 whoever can answer.

11 MS. JOHNSON-HARRELL: I pointed  
12 to you because that's your job.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: I should  
14 have waited for the testimony?

15 MR. BLYSTONE: That's okay. My  
16 name is Jeff Blystone. I'm the Manager  
17 of the Victims Compensation Program at  
18 the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and  
19 Delinquency.

20 Yes. The article that you  
21 spoke of was a claim that we had denied  
22 and had gone to a hearing level, and part  
23 of what you'll hear in my testimony is  
24 that the Crime Victims Act, which is our  
25 governing law, states that in all cases

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2 when a claim is filed, we need to review  
3 all documentation and determine whether  
4 or not the victim was engaged in illegal  
5 activity or contributory conduct. And it  
6 goes on to say that if we find that there  
7 was, that we shall then reduce or deny  
8 the claim, you know, that has been filed.  
9 So that was the essence of the newspaper  
10 article. We had had that claim come in  
11 and we had denied it and it had gone to a  
12 hearing stage.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: So help me  
14 to understand "contributing factor." I  
15 understand the committing of a crime. I  
16 get that part. When you say  
17 "contributing factor," like I was walking  
18 down the street and because I was on the  
19 wrong street, what --

20 MR. BLYSTONE: No.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: I got in an  
22 argument and I fought back? What do you  
23 mean?

24 MR. BLYSTONE: Well, when we  
25 look at contributory conduct -- we're not

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2 investigators. What we do is, we rely on  
3 information that we receive from the  
4 police report, talking to the detective,  
5 looking to see if there were any  
6 independent witnesses within the police  
7 report to see what those witnesses had  
8 said. If there's been an arrest, we'll  
9 reach out and talk to the District  
10 Attorney's Office to try to get more  
11 information relative to that.

12 But contributory conduct can be  
13 drug deals, mutual fights.

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: What is a  
15 mutual fight?

16 MR. BLYSTONE: That's probably  
17 one of the hardest ones that we have.  
18 It's really where two people agree that,  
19 hey, we're going to meet up and we're  
20 going to have a fight. We don't see it  
21 that much, but that is one that we do --  
22 we see a fight where it turns into a  
23 higher level of a fight where somebody  
24 pulls out a weapon and uses it.

25 I'm just trying to think of

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2 some of the others here. Simply  
3 possessing drugs is not illegal activity.  
4 We don't look at that if it's personal  
5 use and not causally related.

6 So essentially what we do is,  
7 as we're reading the police report and  
8 getting the information from law  
9 enforcement, whoever can give us  
10 information, we're looking to see that  
11 was what they had done causally related  
12 to the crime that occurred to them. And,  
13 again, that's based on a review we have  
14 to do by our law.

15 And so, yeah, contributory  
16 conduct is, did the victim contribute in  
17 any way to the crime that occurred to  
18 them.

19 COUNCILMAN JONES: So as Chair  
20 of this Committee but wearing my hat  
21 coming up during the budget process as a  
22 Councilman, you're going to have to give  
23 me clear definition.

24 And then as a result of this  
25 article, has there been any changes to

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2 that interpretation?

3 MR. BLYSTONE: No. I mean,  
4 after the article -- well, after the  
5 article came out, we did do a rather  
6 extensive review process of our -- of how  
7 we look at claims, our claims review.  
8 And we have a specialized unit who works  
9 on nothing but these claims where there  
10 may be illegal activity or contributory  
11 conduct. And so it's their  
12 responsibility. They've been trained on  
13 things to look for, questions to ask of  
14 detectives. And I think it's important  
15 to say that just because the detective  
16 says that the person was involved in  
17 illegal activity doesn't necessarily mean  
18 that we're going to deny the claim. A  
19 lot of times we'll hear that, yes, they  
20 were involved in this, but there's  
21 nothing else in the police report that  
22 supports it or the things just don't add  
23 up to what we're actually hearing.

24 The other -- and especially out  
25 of Philadelphia here, one of the problems

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2 we see is that we get very limited police  
3 information when we're looking at claims.  
4 You know, we ask for a police report, and  
5 usually all we get is the 48 and the 49  
6 documents, which have very limited  
7 information, and then we also send a  
8 questionnaire to the detective asking  
9 them to fill out whether or not the  
10 victim was involved in illegal activity  
11 or did they initiate the victimization  
12 and then did they cooperate with the  
13 police, all three which we have to look  
14 at under the Crime Victims Act.

15 COUNCILMAN JONES: I apologize.

16 MR. BLYSTONE: That's okay.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: I'm going to  
18 put a pin in that. Please begin your  
19 testimony, but I'm just giving you  
20 forewarning you're going to have to give  
21 me specific data on that, because if  
22 there is a big difference between  
23 Philadelphia victims and out of city  
24 victims, you're going to have to explain  
25 that.

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2 MR. BLYSTONE: Well, before I  
3 get started with that, I can tell you  
4 that we received almost 13,000 claims  
5 last year. Of those 13,000 claims, we  
6 only denied 406, and of that -- and don't  
7 quote me completely on this number, but I  
8 think only about 147 of those were for  
9 illegal activity or contributory conduct.  
10 So that's less than 2 percent of all the  
11 claims that we've received last year, and  
12 that's been pretty consistent over the  
13 last couple of years.

14 JUDGE DeLEON: How much money  
15 does that come out to in claims that you  
16 granted?

17 MR. BLYSTONE: In --

18 JUDGE DeLEON: That 12,000.

19 MR. BLYSTONE: In 2017, it was  
20 \$12.1 million is what we paid out in  
21 2017.

22 MR. ROJAS: Now, let me see if  
23 I can understand this. So whose evidence  
24 are you using to make the determination?

25 MR. BLYSTONE: The Police



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2 Department's.

3 MR. ROJAS: Just the police?  
4 What about witnesses? If you can't get  
5 witnesses to come forward and agree to  
6 testify in murder trials, how are you --  
7 are you reaching out? Are you making a  
8 concerted effort to reach out to possible  
9 witnesses that saw what happened?

10 MR. BLYSTONE: No. When I talk  
11 about witnesses, I'm talking about  
12 witness statements that are included in  
13 the police report where they're talking  
14 about this witness and they were an  
15 independent witness or this witness. So,  
16 no, we don't reach out to them. It's  
17 what's in the police report.

18 MR. ROJAS: So it's the Police  
19 Department that's actually making the  
20 determination?

21 MR. BLYSTONE: No. We make the  
22 final determination. And, again, a lot  
23 of times we don't go with what the  
24 police -- the Police Department may be  
25 saying that this person didn't cooperate,

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2 you know, but we know that the victim can  
3 show us where they've cooperated and  
4 contacted police and so forth. When it  
5 comes to illegal activity and  
6 contributory conduct, I mean, that's one  
7 piece that we're looking at, is that  
8 police report, but also because the staff  
9 that we have that are reviewing these  
10 over time have learned which additional  
11 questions to ask, and so a lot of it is  
12 through that conversation back and forth  
13 with the detective learning more about  
14 maybe what's not in the police report.

15 MR. ROJAS: Now, is there any  
16 citizen participation in making that  
17 determination?

18 MR. BLYSTONE: No, sir.

19 MR. ROJAS: Okay.

20 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: I'm sorry.  
21 You can proceed with your testimony.

22 MR. BLYSTONE: Thank you.

23 Good morning. As I said, my  
24 name is Jeffrey Blystone. I'm the  
25 Manager of the Victims Compensation

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2 Program at the Pennsylvania Commission on  
3 Crime and Delinquency. We'd like to  
4 thank you for providing the opportunity  
5 to speak with you today about victims  
6 compensation and the financial benefits  
7 it provides to assist victims of crime.

8           Victims Compensation was  
9 established as a reimbursement program by  
10 the Crime Victims Act in 1976. The Act  
11 provides guidelines for eligibility and  
12 the benefits offered through Victims  
13 Compensation Program. The Act also  
14 provides the funding through a \$35  
15 assessment on every criminal offender  
16 convicted or has pled guilty in  
17 Pennsylvania. No state tax dollars are  
18 used to fund this program.

19           Victims Compensation also  
20 receives an annual Victims of Crime Act  
21 grant from the federal Office of Victims  
22 of Crime. The grant is funded by  
23 criminal offenders at the federal level.

24           Currently to be eligible for  
25 victims compensation in Pennsylvania,

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2 victims must report the crime to proper  
3 authorities within 72 hours or file a  
4 protection from abuse order; must  
5 cooperate with law enforcement,  
6 prosecution, and compensation; and must  
7 file a claim within two years from the  
8 date of the crime. Additionally, by law,  
9 Victims Compensation is required to  
10 review every claim and shall determine  
11 whether the victim's conduct contributed  
12 to the injuries sustained and, if so,  
13 they shall reduce or deny the claim.

14 The maximum amount that could  
15 be paid through the Victims Compensation  
16 is \$35,000 per claim. There are three  
17 specialized exceptions to the \$35,000  
18 maximum. They are: An additional  
19 thousand dollars may be paid for a  
20 forensic rape examination, up to \$500 for  
21 crime scene cleanup, and up to \$10,000 is  
22 available for counseling. The amount of  
23 counseling is dependent upon the  
24 relationship to the victim. For example,  
25 a minor child victim can receive up to

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2 \$10,000. A witness to a crime can  
3 receive up to \$1,500. There are others  
4 in between who are eligible for varying  
5 amounts of counseling.

6 Currently, benefits available  
7 for reimbursement through the Victims  
8 Compensation Program include counseling,  
9 crime scene cleanup, forensic rape exam,  
10 funeral expenses up to \$6,500, loss of  
11 earnings up to \$15,000, loss of support  
12 up to \$20,000 for homicide cases only,  
13 medical expenses. They're paid at 65  
14 percent, and the provider must accept  
15 that as payment in full. Relocation  
16 expenses up to \$1,000; replacement of  
17 personal health items stolen or damaged,  
18 for example, cane, dentures, et cetera;  
19 stolen cash up to one month of a benefit  
20 entitlement or actual loss, whichever is  
21 less; and transportation expenses.

22 In 2017, Victims Compensation  
23 received a total of 12,967. Of those,  
24 3,216 were from Philadelphia.  
25 Additionally, in 2017, 16,371 payments

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2 were made on 8,600 claims, totalling  
3 \$12,174,575. Of those payments, 3,426  
4 payments were made on 1,996 claims,  
5 totalling \$3,576,204 for Philadelphia  
6 claimants.

7 Thank you.

8 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Brief  
9 question. Are there any kind of  
10 disqualifying, I guess, offenses that one  
11 would -- as a victim that would  
12 disqualify me from being eligible for any  
13 kind of service or compensation?

14 MR. BLYSTONE: Crimes that are  
15 eligible are all Title 18 crimes. The  
16 Title 35 --

17 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: I'm not  
18 sure if the public knows what Title 18  
19 is.

20 MR. BLYSTONE: Title 18 crimes  
21 are -- I just know them as Title 18  
22 crimes. I'm sorry. But they're like  
23 your more major offenses such as like  
24 homicide, assault, rape, those types.  
25 Then there's Title 35, which are drug

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2 crimes; Title 75, we are able to pay for  
3 driving under the influence, homicide by  
4 vehicle, and hit and run. And then  
5 there's -- I can't remember the title,  
6 but it's water craft. It's the same ones  
7 under -- as were under the vehicle code  
8 of Title 75, DUI, homicide, and hit and  
9 run.

10 JUDGE DeLEON: Can crime  
11 victims receive any compensation to help  
12 towards schooling or job counseling or  
13 anything like that? Can they get any  
14 kind of help in that respect?

15 MR. BLYSTONE: You know, we  
16 look at those on a case-by-case basis.

17 JUDGE DeLEON: So there is  
18 some?

19 MR. BLYSTONE: It's possible.  
20 When it comes to that, it's somebody who  
21 has been in counseling and the counselor  
22 is usually saying, look, to get this  
23 person to the next step, this is what  
24 they need to do. But it's not normally  
25 something that we would reimburse for,

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2 no.

3 JUDGE DeLEON: Okay.

4 MR. ROJAS: When people don't  
5 use the counseling, let's say you have  
6 five children in the family and they  
7 don't all take the counseling, are you  
8 creating a surplus in your office?

9 MR. BLYSTONE: Do we create  
10 what, sir?

11 MR. ROJAS: Are you creating a  
12 surplus because the money is going  
13 unused?

14 MR. BLYSTONE: No, we're not  
15 creating a surplus. Right now we take in  
16 just about enough money to -- with what  
17 we put out in a given year.

18 MR. ROJAS: So if you are hit  
19 with a big onslaught of claims, you have  
20 the budget to cover it?

21 MR. BLYSTONE: As it stands, we  
22 could probably go one year without some  
23 correction to it. There are a couple  
24 things that we are attempting to do with  
25 the Crime Victims Act now through the



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2 Legislature to increase the money in that  
3 fund, but, yeah. So as it stands now, we  
4 could probably pay one year's worth of  
5 claims if the budget were to stop today.

6 MS. JOHNSON-HARRELL: And can I  
7 add something that Jeff didn't talk  
8 about? So we have monthly meetings here  
9 in Philadelphia with the Pennsylvania  
10 Victim Advocate, Jennifer Storm, and with  
11 that, where victims are not eligible for  
12 the claim because the decedent may  
13 have -- they see it that they may have  
14 been responsible for their own demise,  
15 they are actually creating language now  
16 to take into Legislature to stop that,  
17 and it looks very, very promising, and  
18 we've actually been having this  
19 conversation with Jennifer. We have one  
20 victim here specifically that has been  
21 denied because her son was attacked. He  
22 was defending himself. Her name is Lisa  
23 Espinosa.

24 Oh, she just stepped out.

25 But it's those cases that

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2 brought it to our concern. But not only  
3 that, the family should not be penalized  
4 when they're trying to bury their child  
5 that they had no intentions of burying  
6 because of this law.

7 MR. BLYSTONE: And that is  
8 correct. Just a little bit of a  
9 correction. The law is in homicide cases  
10 only where we would look at funeral  
11 benefits, so that \$6,500 that's available  
12 for funeral benefits. We would not look  
13 at the conduct for that piece.

14 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Well, I  
15 want to thank you so much for your  
16 testimony.

17 Movita, thank you for your  
18 passion and discussion today and your  
19 balance that you have and experience that  
20 you bring. You're perfect for this  
21 position and the City of Philadelphia is  
22 lucky to have you.

23 MS. JOHNSON-HARRELL: Thank  
24 you.

25 JUDGE DeLEON: I'll send you

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2 both a copy of my book, and if you want  
3 to, you can reach out to me on what you  
4 feel about it.

5 MS. JOHNSON-HARRELL:

6 Absolutely. Thank you.

7 JUDGE DeLEON: You're welcome.

8 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Thank you  
9 so much.

10 (Applause.)

11 THE CLERK: Dr. Joel Fein,  
12 Laura Vega, and Dr. Natalie Stavas.

13 (Witnesses approached witness  
14 table.)

15 DR. STAVAS: Good morning. My  
16 name is Natalie and I'm a physician at  
17 the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.  
18 And just to provide a little context  
19 about why we're here is, we're here to  
20 actually hopefully give some insight in  
21 not just prevention but pre-prevention  
22 and pre-pre-prevention. So hopefully  
23 some of our discussion today will involve  
24 that as well as answering questions that  
25 you may have about our testimony.

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2 So who am I particularly? So I  
3 am Natalie. I am actually a child abuse  
4 pediatrician. So I see all children who  
5 come to the Children's Hospital who are  
6 victims of abuse and neglect. I also  
7 work at three of the sexual abuse clinics  
8 around our city, and I work at the City's  
9 only fostering health program, which is a  
10 medical clinic, where our goal is to see  
11 all children within 72 hours of being  
12 placed into foster care.

13 So a theme that I have heard  
14 come up as I've been sitting here this  
15 morning hearing all of these really  
16 moving testimonies is why. Why is this  
17 happening? And I don't think I have all  
18 the answers to the why, but I think I  
19 have some of the answers to the why, and  
20 a lot of it has to do with childhood  
21 trauma, adverse childhood experiences.  
22 We know that even starting as young as  
23 kindergarten some children who have  
24 experienced trauma are already exhibiting  
25 their own signs of behavioral issues.

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2 That's as early as four years old.

3 When you move up into the  
4 pre-teen years and the teenage years,  
5 which is a lot of the children we see in  
6 our foster care clinic, age 11 to 13 is  
7 the most common age for children in the  
8 foster care system, and just to make you  
9 guys aware, there's over 6,000 children  
10 in the foster care system in Philadelphia  
11 County at any given time. That's 6,000  
12 children who are at very high risk.

13 These children have experienced  
14 significant trauma in their life. So as  
15 these children go through their years in  
16 the foster care system, many of them  
17 actually do come into contact with the  
18 criminal justice system.

19 If you look at the statistics  
20 for youth in the criminal justice system,  
21 92 percent have had a significant adverse  
22 experience as a child. The average  
23 number of adverse childhood experiences  
24 or what we would call toxic experiences  
25 or toxic stress, the average number is

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2 14. So that's the average number of  
3 toxic experience that a youth has who is  
4 in the juvenile justice system. That is  
5 a very high number for these kids.

6 If you look at the percentage  
7 of kids in the juvenile criminal system,  
8 up to 70 percent have actually spent time  
9 in the foster care system or children and  
10 youth services has known about these  
11 children. Now, that's not all the  
12 children, and that's not everyone's  
13 story, because everyone has a different  
14 story, but it's a huge chunk of the  
15 children and of the young adults, of the  
16 15-year-olds, the 13-year-olds, the  
17 10-year-olds that we're seeing enter this  
18 system.

19 So I think from my experience  
20 working with these children and seeing  
21 these children in our foster care system  
22 and our foster care program and our  
23 sexual assault programs is that a big  
24 place where we can move the needle is by  
25 honing in on this really vulnerable

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2 population. If we know this is a  
3 population of children that has a really  
4 high risk of becoming involved in the  
5 criminal justice system, becoming  
6 involved in violence, I really do think  
7 this is some place that we should look  
8 with a closer microscope if we can do  
9 preventive measures amongst this  
10 population.

11 You look like you have a  
12 question.

13 JUDGE DeLEON: No. I mean,  
14 you're exactly correct, because the  
15 prisons in Pennsylvania are built based  
16 on the amount of third graders. So  
17 you're definitely correct on your  
18 assessment.

19 DR. STAVAS: So the answer then  
20 is, what do we do about this situation.  
21 And so what we do is -- when I talk to  
22 these children -- I have children who are  
23 brought to me from correctional  
24 facilities just to have a medical,  
25 because they can't get the medical care

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2 they need, and a lot of them are looking  
3 for intervention. A lot of them are  
4 looking for treatment. A lot of them are  
5 looking for cognitive-focused therapy.

6 There are some statistics out  
7 there. So if you look at violent crimes  
8 committed by teenagers, so violent crimes  
9 committed by people under the age of 18,  
10 if you take a cohort of those children  
11 who undergo mentorship and trauma-focused  
12 cognitive behavioral therapy compared to  
13 children who don't, their recidivism  
14 rate, the children who get intervention,  
15 is one percent versus the recidivism rate  
16 for those other children, which is closer  
17 to 50 percent. So we know there are  
18 areas that we can move the needle and we  
19 know where these children exist. The  
20 system knows these children. We know who  
21 these people are.

22 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: I think  
23 that's one thing I was going to say.

24 (Applause.)

25 DR. STAVAS: Thank you.



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2 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: My office  
3 represents children who have been deemed  
4 abused and neglected and we also  
5 represent people who have committed a  
6 criminal act, and we see the correlation  
7 between children that we represent and  
8 the children that come back through  
9 some -- through our other system.

10 One of the areas that I've seen  
11 as I went to view that court system a  
12 couple times are people making decisions  
13 based on availability of funds and what  
14 types of services to give a kid. My  
15 husband, a caveat, is a judge in that  
16 system, and when he wants to give some  
17 individualized treatment that may be a  
18 little bit out of the norm of expenses,  
19 oftentimes those claims are denied. And  
20 so I guess when we're talking about  
21 criminal justice reform, we don't talk  
22 about reform on that end in terms of the  
23 money that should go into that system, so  
24 that when we're looking at a child as an  
25 individual and what do you need

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2 individually, we don't deny claims based  
3 on available funding. I don't know why  
4 that is. I don't know why they've denied  
5 the claims. I don't know if there's some  
6 cutoff as to how much they will pay for a  
7 kid in a certain neighborhood given their  
8 trajectory of ability, the human capital  
9 that they are going to be, but if there  
10 is some determination or calculation,  
11 could you explain that and why, if you  
12 know.

13 DR. STAVAS: I don't think I  
14 have the answer to that particular  
15 question about the individualization. Is  
16 that kind of what you're asking too, of  
17 how we --

18 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: How much do  
19 they provide a kid? I don't know how you  
20 can say that's too much. I don't know  
21 how you can say we can't pay for that.

22 DR. STAVAS: Yeah. I mean, if  
23 it were up to me, I would just throw  
24 everything I had to these children,  
25 because we have a window where we can

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2 help them and that window is so small,  
3 and I wish I had -- it's so complicated,  
4 but how we divert some of the resources  
5 that the women and resources we have to  
6 this population of 6,000 children that  
7 are in the foster care system, we know a  
8 large percentage of them are going to end  
9 up either being victims of violent crime  
10 or committing that crime themselves.

11 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Thank you.

12 MS. VEGA: Good afternoon. My  
13 name is Laura Vega. I'm a clinical  
14 supervisor and trauma therapist for  
15 CHOP's Violence Intervention Program.  
16 And as we spoke earlier a little bit  
17 about Temple's program, we are  
18 hospital-based and we provide intensive  
19 community-focused case management and  
20 trauma therapy to reduce the medical and  
21 psychosocial barriers for youth as a  
22 result of interpersonal violence. And  
23 I'm really thankful to have this  
24 opportunity to speak on this very  
25 important topic. I hope to provide

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2 valuable insight to improve the current  
3 resources and services provided to young  
4 victims of crime.

5 As we have heard throughout  
6 this session, that the psychosocial  
7 challenges for youth, their families, and  
8 communities are just as important, if not  
9 more so, than the physical toll they  
10 take. And we know this all too well in  
11 Philadelphia, a city whose homicide rate  
12 is five times the national average.

13 At Children's Hospital, we are  
14 seeing an increasing violence every year,  
15 with last year reaching almost 600 youth  
16 seeking treatment as a result of an  
17 assault.

18 And it's also critical to know  
19 that 85 percent of the children seeking  
20 treatment for violent injuries are  
21 injured in their schools or directly  
22 before or after school. And these  
23 statistics are not able to fully capture  
24 the individual stories of so many youth  
25 in our city. As a trauma therapist, I am

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2 privileged to work with these youth and I  
3 am able to see the physical, emotional,  
4 cognitive, and behavioral impact of these  
5 traumatic experiences. I am also able to  
6 witness the systemic injustice that  
7 results when families try to access care.

8 I would like to share James's  
9 story. James is a 15-year-old African  
10 American male. He was jumped by five  
11 peers in the bathroom of his public  
12 school and suffered a severe concussion  
13 and broken jaw. He lives with his mother  
14 and five younger siblings. In addition  
15 to his recent assault, James has  
16 witnessed five fatal shootings on his  
17 block in the last couple of years. As a  
18 result of these experiences and being the  
19 oldest boy in the home, James stays awake  
20 most nights and can only sleep when it is  
21 light out. He does not feel safe in his  
22 neighborhood or his school, and when  
23 walking his siblings to school, he often  
24 looks over his shoulder and replays in  
25 his head what he would do if he were

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2 jumped again.

3 I think about James and the  
4 amount of violence he has experienced  
5 already at his young age. I think about  
6 how those experiences shape his world  
7 view, his perception of safety, his  
8 education, and his goals for his future.  
9 I think about what I can do better, what  
10 we can do better so that this child has  
11 the opportunity and the access to heal  
12 from these experiences, to feel safe, and  
13 ways that we can reduce the amount of  
14 re-traumatization for this child. I  
15 think about James as the identified  
16 victim for this most recent assault and  
17 wish that the impact of trauma stopped  
18 there.

19 We have heard throughout this  
20 morning how violent events can affect a  
21 victim's siblings, parents, and friends,  
22 but we often do not hear about the impact  
23 and violent injury on James's teacher,  
24 his school police officer, his principal,  
25 doctor, the Philadelphia police officer,

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2 district attorney, and me, his therapist.  
3 In his one story alone, there are five  
4 different systems represented. This  
5 means five different touch points, each  
6 offering a different opportunity to bring  
7 healing rather than harm to this family.  
8 And too often the reality is that some of  
9 these very systems designed to facilitate  
10 healing and safety can often perpetuate  
11 more trauma.

12 I have been in courtrooms and  
13 experienced judges who have really taken  
14 the time to listen to a child's situation  
15 and use that child's strength to lead  
16 them on a better path. I have also been  
17 in courtrooms where families' concerns  
18 were disregarded while they were waiting  
19 for information, and have seen and heard  
20 core personnel make negatively charged  
21 assumptions about why families were  
22 there. I have met detectives who tried  
23 to get to know our children and what they  
24 have overcome and also have seen  
25 detectives dismiss and disrespect

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2 families, silencing them and making them  
3 feel insignificant.

4 I believe that we can learn  
5 from some of the best practices from  
6 other successful cities that are tackling  
7 the same issue. I strongly support that  
8 each system can benefit from training and  
9 education to become trauma-informed  
10 systems. According to SAMHSA, a  
11 trauma-informed system realizes the wide  
12 impact -- the widespread impact of  
13 trauma; recognizes signs and symptoms in  
14 clients, families, and staff; integrates  
15 this knowledge into policy and practice;  
16 and seeks to resist re-traumatization.  
17 And so if we really want to reduce  
18 re-traumatization, we also need to take  
19 care of the providers doing this work.  
20 We need to understand the impact of  
21 secondary traumatic stress on our police  
22 officers, our district attorneys, public  
23 defenders, DHS workers, teachers,  
24 therapists, probation officers, doctors,  
25 and social workers.



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2 I am passionate about this  
3 issue, and having seen the impact of  
4 secondary trauma on my own staff in our  
5 violence prevention specialists, I have  
6 developed a specific program to help them  
7 manage these issues called the  
8 Stress-Less Initiative. Stress-Less is a  
9 group model designed to reduce secondary  
10 trauma and allows staff to reflect on how  
11 this work affects them both personally  
12 and professionally. We also have offered  
13 this outside of CHOP, partnering with  
14 similar programs such as Healing Hurt  
15 People and the Department of Behavioral  
16 Health to implement Stress-Less at their  
17 sites.

18 And so we hope that there could  
19 be more organizational support around  
20 this issue, whereby criminal justice  
21 systems have trauma-informed training,  
22 including how to deal with secondary  
23 trauma as a routine part of their  
24 training and daily work.

25 Our colleagues at Drexel

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2 University, including Dr. Sandy Bloom,  
3 Linda Rich, and Mr. Robert Reed from the  
4 Attorney General's Office have already  
5 approached the Philadelphia Police  
6 Department with this concept.

7 In addition to training and  
8 education, we have to find ways to  
9 coordinate efforts and services across  
10 systems. My violence intervention  
11 specialists spend their days and often  
12 their nights helping assault victims  
13 obtain medical, mental health, legal  
14 assistance, and social services whose  
15 representatives often have disparate  
16 goals. We need to reduce silos and work  
17 together to eliminate redundancy and  
18 reduce the logistic and emotional  
19 barriers for our youth and families who  
20 are trying to access multiple systems.

21 We have made great strides in  
22 recent years to deliver more  
23 trauma-focused services that meet the  
24 needs of family. We have built specific  
25 alliances and special committees to help

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2 bring systems together, but we have a  
3 long road ahead.

4 I am fortunate to work at CHOP,  
5 which wholeheartedly supports the work  
6 that we do to promote the health and  
7 wellness of children, and I know other  
8 institutions and agencies share similar  
9 goals. I am confident in our ability to  
10 continue to collaborate and continue this  
11 important work together and to meet the  
12 comprehensive needs of young victims of  
13 crime.

14 JUDGE DeLEON: That was really  
15 great, but you forgot about the judges  
16 and their secondary trauma, because we're  
17 listening to cases day after day after  
18 day after day, case after case after case  
19 after case. There's definitely trauma  
20 among the judges, and we discuss this all  
21 the time. There's a suicide rate for  
22 judges who hear criminal cases that's a  
23 little bit higher than police officers  
24 who act on the cases. So don't forget  
25 about us.

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2 MS. VEGA: Sorry about that.

3 JUDGE DeLEON: You just have to  
4 add that word and you're fine.

5 DR. FEIN: Good afternoon. My  
6 name is Joel Fein and I'm a pediatrician  
7 and emergency physician at Children's  
8 Hospital of Philadelphia. So early in my  
9 career, my work in the emergency  
10 department kind of generated the notion  
11 that the medical community needed to step  
12 up and contribute to solving the problem  
13 of violence in our city rather than just  
14 patching people up and sending them out  
15 with their physical wounds. And as a  
16 consequence, I began to develop and  
17 eventually lead a number of violence  
18 prevention programs, one of which you've  
19 just heard about, over the past two  
20 decades, and together with colleagues at  
21 CHOP, we formed the Violence Prevention  
22 Initiative, which refines and evaluates  
23 programs on bullying, domestic violence,  
24 and assault-injured youth, as you heard  
25 of from Ms. Vega.

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2 I would like to offer some  
3 thoughts about what has worked and what  
4 has not worked and, most importantly,  
5 what we need to learn more about so we  
6 can move forward in reducing the violence  
7 and impact of violence on our families in  
8 Philadelphia and their children.

9 So being a physician, my lens  
10 kind of sees primarily violence as a  
11 health problem, not as a criminal justice  
12 problem.

13 (Applause.)

14 DR. FEIN: And this is a lens  
15 that I apparently share with many, but  
16 the fact is that healthcare and criminal  
17 justice approaches actually converge when  
18 we promote efforts that are  
19 evidence-informed, trauma-informed, and  
20 innovative. And being an ER physician, I  
21 am going to start with my take-home  
22 points, so in case you get hungry or fall  
23 asleep, I will at least get them in  
24 there, and then I'll elaborate on them,  
25 if you allow me.

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2 But the first is that there is  
3 a science to violence prevention, and  
4 every program deserves a formal and full  
5 evaluation so that we can do more good  
6 than harm and at least do the most good  
7 for the resources that we have.

8 The second is that what seems  
9 like enough is often insufficient, and  
10 the manner -- so the manner in which we  
11 implement what seems like a good program,  
12 the way that we do it is just as  
13 important as the program itself.

14 And the third is that as we  
15 mentioned, cross-system collaboration is  
16 critical and that when health systems,  
17 police, public health, and community  
18 members, education, all those systems get  
19 together, they can arrive at solutions  
20 together, but we tend to be siloed.

21 So I'll start with the science  
22 of violence prevention. We all know that  
23 no one intervention initiative or program  
24 or approach is going to eradicate the  
25 violence that's experienced by our

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2 Philadelphia communities, but all of our  
3 efforts fall on a continuum of successful  
4 prevention. So it's incumbent on us to  
5 make sure that we evaluate the  
6 initiatives in order to determine the  
7 effect on our kids and the families and,  
8 most importantly, if they do harm,  
9 because they can in fact do harm.

10 So in our limited resource  
11 environment, we also need to know how  
12 they compare to the best practices out  
13 there, and our efforts at CHOP and other  
14 places within our Violence Prevention  
15 Initiative helped build this evidence  
16 about the how's and the why's of violence  
17 in Philadelphia's youth.

18 For example, we collaborated  
19 with Dr. Doug Lieb at Penn and we studied  
20 the retaliatory events that happened  
21 after a youth came to the emergency  
22 department, those 400 to 600 youth that  
23 came to the ER. We actually followed  
24 them over a two-month period and found  
25 that approximately one in five youth were

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2 assaulted as a result of that particular  
3 incident again and another -- possibly  
4 the same group, but another group that  
5 was one in five committed an assault as a  
6 result of that incident. And they were  
7 reporting this anonymously on a phone  
8 pad, so we actually got information from  
9 them that they wouldn't necessarily tell  
10 anybody else.

11 We also found that the vast  
12 majority of these second events occurred  
13 within weeks of that first event. So  
14 within four weeks, about 80 percent of  
15 them occurred. And really tragically,  
16 almost a third of those youth reported to  
17 carrying a gun in the months after an  
18 event. So these events are not sentinel  
19 events, because they may happen often  
20 enough, but when they come to our  
21 emergency department, we at least know  
22 that they're at the highest risk of  
23 retaliation and recidivism.

24 So at CHOP, most of our  
25 critically ill patients are cared for and



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2 monitored in an intensive care unit,  
3 right? We know that these kids are the  
4 highest risk to get sick and possibly  
5 die. But children and young adults who  
6 are injured as a result of violence have  
7 a really similar need for monitoring and  
8 care, just like an intensive care unit.  
9 They are basically presenting in  
10 intensive care.

11 So what should that intensive  
12 care look like? Well, healthcare  
13 providers like us have designed programs  
14 like the violence prevention specialists  
15 that you heard about, and they meet with  
16 these youth soon after the injury. We  
17 get together and we actually form mutual  
18 goals, and those goals can prevent future  
19 injury and keep them out of trouble for  
20 the next few weeks to months after that  
21 injury.

22 So in Philadelphia, CHOP VIP  
23 and you've heard Healing Hurt People are  
24 two such programs, but there are actually  
25 30 or more such programs around the

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2 country, and we've aligned in a group  
3 called the National Network of  
4 Hospital-Based Violence Intervention  
5 programs to learn from each other and to  
6 communicate with each other about this  
7 practice.

8           So research can also provide us  
9 with pretty surprising results. For  
10 example, we looked at kids who came into  
11 our program and they told us what are  
12 their goals. And there is a myth around  
13 the stigma of mental health that says  
14 that men and boys and particularly  
15 African American men and boys do not want  
16 or will not go to mental health therapy.  
17 It turns out that when we asked them, 89  
18 percent of the African American boys in  
19 our program asked for mental health  
20 therapy. They were willing to go, and we  
21 do get them there. And so as a  
22 consequence, we've focused our efforts  
23 and obtained some --

24           COUNCILMAN JONES: I'm sorry.  
25 Could you repeat that statistic?

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2 DR. FEIN: Yes. And I can send  
3 you the publication, if you'd like.

4 We found that 89 percent of  
5 young black males in our program -- these  
6 are adolescents -- stated as one of their  
7 goals mental health. Isn't that  
8 incredibly surprising?

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: That's why  
10 we asked you.

11 DR. FEIN: That's why we do  
12 research, because we would not -- that's  
13 a myth that we like to dispel when we do  
14 this kind of study.

15 We've actually developed a  
16 program now and we're studying it through  
17 a grant on preventing post-traumatic  
18 stress disorder in our violently injured  
19 youth and looking at a particular program  
20 to do that through an NIH grant.

21 So there's other studies in  
22 cities such as Chicago and in  
23 Indianapolis that actually show that  
24 these violence prevention programs  
25 prevent reinjury and recidivism. We're

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2 still studying that in our Philadelphia  
3 organizations, but we are hopeful to find  
4 the same results. And there's also  
5 evidence that some of the street-based  
6 interventions that do similar things,  
7 like CeaseFire and Cure Violence, have  
8 similar effects in reducing assault by  
9 mediating directly after an event.

10 My next thing is what seems  
11 like enough is not enough. So what I'm  
12 going to point out is that  
13 trauma-informed care takes time,  
14 training, and resources. We can't just  
15 say it. So our parents and grandparents  
16 taught us that it's not just what we do,  
17 but it's how we do it that makes the  
18 difference. We've learned that through  
19 our families and through our upbringing,  
20 right? The manner in which we implement  
21 programs is as important as the program  
22 itself.

23 So what we do know is that a  
24 majority of our citizens who need to feel  
25 safe from crime, but they also need to

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2 feel secure in the relationships with the  
3 crime fighters, and a trauma-informed  
4 approach is the way that that can happen.  
5 It means that law enforcement personnel  
6 and civilians alike have to have each  
7 other's best interests in mind, and those  
8 interests most often center around trust  
9 and safety. It means considering what a  
10 person has been through rather than what  
11 they have done. Community members need  
12 to believe that the justice system will  
13 not only treat them fairly, but that  
14 officers, attorneys, and judges within  
15 those systems believe in them and their  
16 future. We know that the science behind  
17 adverse experiences and traumatic stress  
18 argue for high touch approaches to  
19 complement the high tech crime  
20 initiatives that are being implemented in  
21 cities across the country. So a  
22 trauma-informed approach is not an  
23 intervention, but rather a way of being,  
24 and works best when it's applied deeply,  
25 practically, and consistently.

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2 So the kind of culture change  
3 that we need to permeate institutions  
4 from the bottom to the top takes work.  
5 We can't just say we want it to happen  
6 and expect it to magically occur.  
7 Resources need to be put in place for  
8 meaningful, innovative training programs  
9 that incorporate modern adult learning  
10 techniques, such as multimedia  
11 presentations, simulations, and flipped  
12 classrooms. Accountability measures need  
13 to be set up to monitor how our agencies  
14 and municipal organizations are  
15 delivering services, so that we can offer  
16 corrective advice and guidance while  
17 supporting and holding up exemplar  
18 personnel.

19 And so innovation is not new to  
20 this group. Philadelphia has some  
21 shining examples of city and state and  
22 national initiatives that have applied  
23 innovative trauma-informed methods. At  
24 the City level, you're likely familiar  
25 with the person sitting next to you, the

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2 Stoneleigh Fellow and former Deputy  
3 Commissioner, Kevin Bethel, who is doing  
4 work with the police, who respond in the  
5 Philadelphia schools, and training them  
6 to recognize the root causes rather than  
7 the criminalization of disruptive  
8 behaviors.

9 At the state level, Department  
10 of Corrections Commissioner John Wetzel  
11 has not only instituted and expanded  
12 trauma-informed training within the  
13 correction system, but also uses his  
14 position and his pulpit to decrease the  
15 birth-to-prison pipeline by focusing on  
16 early childhood education in children of  
17 incarcerated parents.

18 And at the national level, Bob  
19 Listenbee, former OJJDP administrator,  
20 implemented something called the Smart on  
21 Juvenile Justice Initiative, which  
22 provides states with diversion  
23 alternatives that can reduce recidivism  
24 and reduce the number of youths removed  
25 from their homes and placed into state

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2 custodies and as much as by 60 percent.

3 So saving hundreds of millions of  
4 dollars.

5 So I'm not an expert in justice  
6 policy, and my own research does not  
7 evaluate the effectiveness of these  
8 interventions. I'll leave that to people  
9 like Drs. Naomi Goldstein and John  
10 McDonald from Penn and Naomi from Drexel.  
11 I think they are the people that you have  
12 to ask about those particular programs.  
13 But I will -- my point is that there are  
14 some familiar and common tenets that  
15 cross across systems. They cross across  
16 healthcare, education, social services,  
17 mental health, and the justice system,  
18 and we can't be successful until those  
19 systems learn from each other and, most  
20 importantly, communicate their work  
21 between each other.

22 So that cross system  
23 collaboration is kind of what I want to  
24 end with, which is that along with the  
25 ability to share data, which we don't



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2 actually have right now, we need to use  
3 those data to formulate solutions through  
4 a multi-disciplinary partnership using a  
5 community voice. And so it's not just  
6 enough to share the data. We have to  
7 actually figure out what to do with it.  
8 And so an example of this is the Cardiff  
9 Model from Wales where health systems and  
10 police share data and met with community  
11 agency representatives and reduced  
12 violent injury, the most famous one being  
13 they found that the bottles in bars were  
14 being used in cutting injuries. And so  
15 they basically had all the bars replace  
16 their glass with plastic and reduced  
17 their injuries, but they needed to  
18 actually do the research on that.

19 Now, we have some more complex  
20 issues that we may be addressing in  
21 Philadelphia other than beer bottles, but  
22 it's still an example of taking the data  
23 that we have, filtering it through a  
24 community lens, and making a change  
25 happen. And we're actually trying --

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2 this is going on right now, the Cardiff,  
3 in DeKalb, Georgia, Atlanta, and  
4 Milwaukee, and we're trying to actually  
5 think about getting funding and resources  
6 to begin the Cardiff approach here in  
7 Philadelphia as well with the CDC. So a  
8 natural convener of this would be the  
9 Public Health Department where they would  
10 be able to collect the data and use it  
11 for that purpose.

12 I'll conclude, because I know  
13 that we're running short on time, and I'm  
14 pleased and honored to meet your  
15 Committee and to provide testimony to it.  
16 I hope that my dual role as a clinician  
17 and as an academician helps me convey how  
18 both community-inspired programs but also  
19 vigorous evaluation of these programs  
20 interact. Whatever we do should be  
21 supported by evidence, implemented with  
22 fidelity, infused with trauma-informed  
23 practice, and informed by community  
24 voice. And I'll end there.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: I just want

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2 to real quick because I'm going to leave  
3 it to my Co-Chairs, because I have a  
4 person sitting in my office. I've  
5 learned how to multi-task.

6 DR. FEIN: You can come work  
7 with me if you'd like.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: So when I  
9 sit in that chair and I listen to budget  
10 and one of the reasons I don't miss  
11 budget hearings, like that's -- I nerd  
12 out. I get my little snacks and I sit  
13 there, because you hear different bits  
14 and pieces of the problem by department  
15 and the solutions by department. So  
16 whether you start talking about mental  
17 health or nutrition, you'd be surprised  
18 how they're interconnected to a condition  
19 in a community.

20 Like real quick, if you did --  
21 the poorest part of my districts are two,  
22 24th and Lehigh and around 60th and  
23 Market. That's ground zero. And they're  
24 making come-ups and substantial changes,  
25 but that's where the height of my

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2 problems in my district are.

3 You'll look and do a map and  
4 see dropout rates, you'll see pre-teen  
5 pregnancy, you'll see food deserts,  
6 you'll see organ failures, you'll see  
7 violent crime, all within a map that you  
8 could put right over top of it. But in  
9 identifying that problem, if you reverse  
10 engineer it, you probably have the seeds  
11 of a solution, better education, better  
12 health, remove the food deserts, conflict  
13 resolution not by the end of a gun, and  
14 recreation. Believe it or not, sprinkle  
15 recreation for kids to do goes a very  
16 long way.

17 So I guess what I'm challenging  
18 you to do today, if you had all of those  
19 dials and controls by department, which  
20 ones would you dial up, which ones would  
21 you say are okay, which ones would you  
22 tone down?

23 DR. FEIN: That's a great way  
24 of looking at it. I think another way of  
25 looking at it is that every human is made

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2 up of different parts and they have  
3 different needs. So it's the ability to  
4 turn up and down those resources for a  
5 particular family and the dexterity with  
6 which you do that, that is the most  
7 important thing, and that's what we find  
8 out in our violence intervention  
9 programs. Like some families need four  
10 of the six things that can be provided.  
11 We do housing. We've moved families.  
12 We've provided beds for families that  
13 moved into a house with no furniture, and  
14 we've gone to court with them and  
15 represented them with DAs.

16 So you bring up very well all  
17 of these resources that are needed, but  
18 the point is that you can't necessarily  
19 tell what one family in that one block --  
20 that million-dollar block has different  
21 needs at different times. You need the  
22 dexterity and the ability to respond to  
23 that in an individual way.

24 MS. SHUBIK-RICHARDS: I  
25 actually think the Councilman's question

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2 sort of ties up for me what has been  
3 really present in this hearing, which is  
4 government interventions, particularly  
5 the criminal justice system, that have  
6 wonderful intentions but on the scale in  
7 which we administer criminal justice in  
8 Pennsylvania have horrific consequences.  
9 And government can't do everything.

10 Government can legislate that glass beer  
11 bottles should be replaced with plastic  
12 ones when there's evidence to indicate  
13 that, but government on its own is not  
14 going to implement even evidence-based  
15 programs with fidelity on the scale with  
16 which we have problems in Philadelphia.  
17 It just isn't.

18 And so some of where we started  
19 today was people who are turning to the  
20 government to help them after they've  
21 lost kids, and the government was  
22 re-traumatizing them. So I think if  
23 we're going to prioritize anything in a  
24 budget process, it's to ask where is  
25 government doing harm unintentionally and

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2 where can we prevent that. It's too big  
3 a problem to solve in the budget process.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: So one of my  
5 colleagues is Chair of Health and Human  
6 Services. She's getting ready to have a  
7 big hearing about DHS, who is in all of  
8 this stuff, where I think pre-entry has a  
9 big stake. In one of the testimonies in  
10 a prior hearing, one of the victims  
11 talked about failing the kids in a  
12 neighborhood. Some of these kids were  
13 living in a house run by kids. All of  
14 them were runaways. All of them were in  
15 there for survival, and it was almost  
16 like Robin Hood and the Merry Band of  
17 Thieves. They steal, you direct  
18 resources. And somehow we failed that  
19 household, those kids, because no DHS  
20 worker found them. One child had been  
21 absent a whole number of days from  
22 school. All of those little indications  
23 in those little silos popped up, but  
24 nobody was intervening in time for  
25 pre-entry.

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2 DR. STAVAS: May I comment on  
3 that? Hi. I'm Natalie. We haven't met  
4 yet. You were somewhere else  
5 multi-tasking.

6 I'm a child abuse physician at  
7 CHOP, and the story you just told I see  
8 hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of  
9 times a year. In fact, just last week  
10 DHS was going to close a case when  
11 something happened to one of the children  
12 and they realized that all seven children  
13 in the home were starving, and they were  
14 about to close the case.

15 And so I think the pre-entry  
16 that you're talking about, a huge place  
17 where we could move the needle to your  
18 point, where can we make a difference and  
19 stop doing harm, we know who these  
20 families are. We just do, but there's a  
21 lack of communication and there's a lack  
22 of infrastructure to actually monitor and  
23 help. And so I think that if we in the  
24 DHS realm and the foster care realm --  
25 I'm really passionate about children in



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2 the foster care system, which was what my  
3 testimony was towards, and of course this  
4 conversation is highly complicated and we  
5 could talk about this for hours, but I do  
6 strongly feel that that is an area that  
7 you've just hit on the head that we can  
8 make a difference. And having to share  
9 all and more of my thoughts with you at  
10 any time that you'd like to hear them.

11 COUNCILMAN JONES: My Co-Chairs  
12 who talk a lot less than me are going to  
13 take over.

14 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Well, I  
15 want to say I agree with everything you  
16 said, and I think that our system has  
17 become so overburdened because we've  
18 taken on everything and we've got to be  
19 able to let some things go and put them  
20 back into the realm of the professionals  
21 who are trained to deal with some of  
22 these issue much better than our criminal  
23 justice system can.

24 One of the things that you  
25 said, though, I think is really hard for

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2 us to do is the accountability portion.

3 I'm talking to Community Behavioral

4 Health, and we know we use a lot of

5 programs and a lot of programs generate

6 people and recycle people so many times.

7 Where are those standards that we should

8 be looking for? I know addiction is

9 tough because it's up and down and so is

10 an adverse childhood experience because

11 it's not -- you don't have a finite

12 period of time and say they should be

13 cured by this period of time. How do you

14 begin to, like you said, evaluate these

15 programs specifically so that you can

16 hold them accountable and for what?

17 DR. STAVAS: So I know that

18 there are national accountability

19 standards for children in the foster care

20 system and how to hold agencies

21 accountable. I do know that Philadelphia

22 has struggled for many years to implement

23 those systems into our system. It's

24 something that can be done and should be

25 looked at, and I think there's innovative

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2 ways to do that using techniques as  
3 Dr. Fein was talking about, actually  
4 science-based implementation techniques  
5 and using technology better. We can  
6 harness more information and better  
7 utilize that information over the long  
8 period. There's ways to do it.

9 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: It's a  
10 complicated thing.

11 DR. FEIN: Well, one of the  
12 barriers to accountability -- and we find  
13 this in medicine as well and we've tried  
14 to get over this. I think halfway there  
15 probably -- is that when you hold people  
16 accountable or programs accountable,  
17 there is a fear that they will be held  
18 guilty, right? And so if it's a system  
19 which is a blameless system that we are  
20 all trying to approve an equality  
21 improvement method rather than a "you  
22 stake" method, then I think it really  
23 changes the tone, but what we have  
24 found -- and Laura can talk so much more  
25 eloquently about this than I, but in

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2 listening to the stories of what we've  
3 tried to accomplish is that when we run  
4 into barriers, it's because people fear  
5 that when they go to the point where they  
6 could really help a family, they're going  
7 to get penalized for that, because  
8 they're venturing outside of their own  
9 territory, and that's where -- I hate to  
10 say this, but they may need to take the  
11 chance. We may be able to offer them the  
12 safety of doing something beyond where  
13 they're thinking they should in order to  
14 get work done for that family or that  
15 system.

16 And so I'm just going to stop  
17 there, because I think that's the  
18 general -- the fear of retribution and  
19 fear of losing your job and losing your  
20 role is one of the barriers that we find  
21 for accountability.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BETHEL: I  
23 listened to you because I think about the  
24 public health perspective as you live,  
25 and you know how I feel about CHOP. My

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2 daughter has sickle cell and we've been  
3 there for 17 years, but 17 years ago I  
4 walked into the CHOP environment and kids  
5 were dying from sickle cell because of  
6 their blood infections, and through the  
7 process, they learned that if they  
8 immediately give my daughter antibiotics,  
9 that that would stop her from dying, and  
10 17 years later, my daughter is healthy  
11 and continuing. We've been doing it  
12 every time she gets a fever. She goes  
13 into the hospital and she gets her  
14 antibiotics, because they think it may  
15 be -- and that has saved her life.

16 So I think about what you say  
17 is that process of really understanding  
18 how a public health perspective can  
19 really be the game changer in this whole  
20 conversation. How do you get folks to  
21 move into this space and I guess, more  
22 importantly -- and maybe all of you  
23 can -- how do we get these systems to be  
24 able to talk? I could bring one of my  
25 young kids that I diverted to you today

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2 in the middle of this room and he can  
3 have all of these services around him and  
4 no one knows that my kid is in foster  
5 care, no one knows that he's dealing with  
6 multiple levels of trauma, no one knows  
7 that he's been beat ten times. I mean,  
8 all this stuff that we know about him and  
9 no one can tell me about him. So how do  
10 we ever deal with the root issues if we  
11 can't have a system that allows us that  
12 opportunity to talk about it?

13 DR. FEIN: I agree with you,  
14 and part of my testimony is really around  
15 the breaking down of the fear of HIPAA  
16 and justice reporting. In juvenile  
17 justice we can't get any information from  
18 on our kids, and there's a reason for  
19 that, right? But in a public health  
20 world, you would want to say, okay, this  
21 is a public health problem, so just like  
22 we do with HIV and sexually transmitted  
23 infections where we create data  
24 repositories so that we can help people  
25 better and using a public health law to

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2 let us talk to each other, that's one  
3 string that we could follow that we  
4 haven't yet done in Philadelphia for  
5 violence. We haven't considered a public  
6 health trauma to the effect where we can  
7 share those data.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BETHEL:

9 Have you seen some place where that is  
10 happening at, where there is someone who  
11 has been able to build these --

12 DR. FEIN: So the Boston Health  
13 Department is probably the closest one  
14 that I can think of that --

15 MS. SHUBIK-RICHARDS: Allegheny  
16 County as well.

17 DR. FEIN: What's that?

18 MS. SHUBIK-RICHARDS: And  
19 Allegheny County.

20 DR. FEIN: Allegheny County,  
21 great. I don't know about that one.  
22 Thank you.

23 MS. SHUBIK-RICHARDS: So in the  
24 child welfare world -- and you in the  
25 child welfare world know -- that

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2 Allegheny County -- and Philadelphia has  
3 actually consulted with Allegheny County  
4 and tried this, but --

5 DR. STAVAS: We tried.

6 MS. SHUBIK-RICHARDS: Right.

7 Tried and failed repeatedly, but  
8 Allegheny County has a child  
9 welfare/juvenile justice shared data  
10 system, and it's allowed to do some great  
11 research with it that is beyond our grasp  
12 here in Philly working in the same  
13 statutory framework.

14 MR. ROJAS: I want to ask you a  
15 question. First of all, I want to thank  
16 you for your testimony. You said that 89  
17 percent of African Americans self-report  
18 that they have a mental health issue?

19 DR. FEIN: No. Thank you for  
20 letting me clarify that. I said that in  
21 our Violence Intervention Program, the  
22 children and families that were accepted  
23 and consented to be in that program, 89  
24 percent of them requested mental health  
25 care. Now, I don't -- that doesn't mean



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2 they have a mental illness. I think it's  
3 really important to make sure that -- in  
4 fact, that's part of the stigma that we  
5 have to get rid of. It means that they  
6 were traumatized and they would like to  
7 talk to a counselor or someone about  
8 their trauma and whatever happened to  
9 them in their life. But they were  
10 willing and open to that care.

11 MR. ROJAS: So drilling down on  
12 that, is that hereditary or is that a  
13 learned behavior, the traumatization in  
14 their life?

15 DR. FEIN: Well, I don't think  
16 that trauma is hereditary in any genetic  
17 sense of the word. I think trauma  
18 sometimes is passed through generations  
19 because of the re-traumatization through  
20 generational trauma, intergenerational  
21 trauma. There's also the traumatic  
22 growth that occurs in that family.

23 So the answer is, no, I don't  
24 think it's hereditary. I think that it  
25 is environmental.

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2 MR. ROJAS: Okay.

3 DR. FEIN: If you have to ask  
4 me to separate those two, which science  
5 will tell us is not that easy to do.

6 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: I want to  
7 just let you know we have to end. The  
8 stenographer has to relieve herself for a  
9 second, so I will give her that courtesy,  
10 but thank you so much your information.  
11 I think you were very informative, and I  
12 hope that we are able to work through  
13 some of these, especially the  
14 accountability portion. The data points  
15 that we need to look at are really  
16 important.

17 Thank you so much.

18 (Thank you.)

19 (Short recess.)

20 THE CLERK: Melany Nelson and  
21 Gwendolyn Phillips.

22 (Witnesses approached witness  
23 table.)

24 MS. NELSON: Good morning. I  
25 am Melany Nelson, the Executive Director

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2 for Northwest Victim Services.

3 So I did edit a little bit.  
4 You guys already received it, correct?  
5 So I did edit a little bit, because Jeff  
6 Blystone, he spoke, and I didn't want to  
7 go over some things that some people were  
8 saying.

9 Good afternoon. My name is  
10 Melany Nelson and I am the Executive  
11 Director for Northwest Victim Services.  
12 I would like to read a statement prepared  
13 by myself and the licensed social worker  
14 of Northwest Victim Services. I would  
15 first like to begin by thanking you for  
16 this wonderful opportunity to have this  
17 statement read at this forum.

18 Northwest Victim Services is  
19 the first grassroot, non-profit agency  
20 created and dedicated to serving victims  
21 and witnesses of crime in the 5th, 14th,  
22 35th, and 39th Police Districts. Since  
23 1981, its reputation for compassionate,  
24 effective service has spread throughout  
25 the Philadelphia region and beyond.

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2 The mission of Northwest Victim  
3 Services is to provide prompt, effective,  
4 and holistic services to victims and  
5 witnesses of crime in Northwest  
6 Philadelphia while increasing prevention  
7 strategies to elevate community safety.  
8 NVS provides free services to all victims  
9 and witnesses of crime.

10 And I'll just go off.

11 So we're in the Criminal  
12 Justice Center three days a week, Monday,  
13 Tuesday, and Thursday. We go to court  
14 with our victims to help them through the  
15 preliminary hearing stages. This can be  
16 a very trying time for victims, so we are  
17 there for them. We are there to hold  
18 their hands and to help them through this  
19 horrible ordeal. We work very closely  
20 with the District Attorney's Office as  
21 well.

22 Northwest Victim Services  
23 receives grant money from the  
24 Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and  
25 Delinquency, PCCD, and the Philadelphia

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2 District Attorney's Office. One of our  
3 requirements is to reach out to victims  
4 within 72 hours of receiving notification  
5 from the four police districts in our  
6 area. Every day we receive a document  
7 called Part 1's from the 5th, 14th, 35th,  
8 and 39th Police Districts which outlines  
9 every crime that has occurred within the  
10 past 24 hours. The NVS advocates mail  
11 information to the victims or witnesses  
12 who may be eligible to file a claim.  
13 Jeff Blystone spoke about the claim and  
14 what the eligibilities are.

15           Because of our many important  
16 collaborations we have with numerous  
17 organizations, many times the 72-hour  
18 requirement has been cut in half. Some  
19 victims we reach in realtime with the  
20 help of the victim assistance officers,  
21 our VAOs. Each VAO in the Northwest  
22 Police Department is phenomenal,  
23 efficient, professional, and they respond  
24 to our requests within an hour. We can  
25 accompany the VAOs to hospitals, home

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2 visits, and they provide us with police  
3 reports in a timely manner.

4 NVS has three important  
5 partnerships that help us respond to  
6 victims in realtime. NVS is a responder  
7 of the Network of Neighbors, which  
8 focuses on violence and traumatic  
9 incidents that occur with 19 years of age  
10 and younger. NVS also receives referral  
11 from Temple Hospital and Einstein  
12 Hospital shortly after a victim is  
13 admitted to the trauma unit or released  
14 from the emergency room. Temple and  
15 Einstein Hospital referrals from the  
16 emergency department comes from the  
17 Healing Hurt People program.

18 NVS strives to provide the  
19 needs of all victims we encounter. The  
20 reason we are successful in this endeavor  
21 is because we have dedicated board member  
22 staff in the collaborations we have with  
23 all of the other victim agencies, South  
24 Philadelphia Victim Agency, North Central  
25 Victim Agency, Center City Victim Agency,

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2 Northeast Victim Agency, AVP, Congreso,  
3 and Concilio.

4 Northwest Victim Services also  
5 collaborates with Every Murder is Real,  
6 Women Organized Against Rape, Women  
7 Against Abuse, Tabor Children Service,  
8 and we recently developed a relationship  
9 with the CHARLES Foundation. There are  
10 times we work with others to ensure that  
11 victims we are working with receive all  
12 the services they need to help them heal.

13 For example, on Saturday,  
14 October the 14th, 2017, I received a call  
15 from the inspector from the Northwest  
16 Police Department informing me of  
17 services a grandmother needed because her  
18 16-year-old was shot in the back and  
19 killed during a shootout. The  
20 16-year-old, his cousins and others were  
21 outside playing when this horrible ordeal  
22 took place. The 16-year-old cousin was  
23 shot in the arm.

24 I understand the importance of  
25 not working normal business hours, so I

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2 contacted the grandmother immediately.

3 NVS provides counseling  
4 services for the grandmother, and we are  
5 also working with the mother to provide  
6 her with relocation, because the shooters  
7 still reside in the neighborhood. So she  
8 sees those shooters every day. It took  
9 mom about a month to come into our office  
10 to ask for services for relocation, but  
11 the grandmother is the one who is seeking  
12 services for the young children.

13 So I understand the importance  
14 of collaboration with Northwest Victim  
15 Services, and that's how we're going to  
16 be able to provide services to all the  
17 victims that we encounter.

18 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Thank you  
19 so much.

20 MS. HOWELL: Good afternoon.  
21 My name is Ashley Howell and I am an  
22 intern with Northwest Victim Services and  
23 I work under the supervision of Gwendolyn  
24 Phillips, who is the licensed clinical  
25 social worker at the agency. I just want



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2 to touch on a few key points about how  
3 trauma affects the communities and  
4 individuals that we serve at Victim  
5 Services.

6 Traumatic experiences can  
7 change how you interact with your  
8 environment, the people around you, how  
9 you perceive the world, and how the world  
10 perceives you. Trauma left untreated can  
11 give rise to a host of mental health  
12 disorders and maladaptive behaviors,  
13 including substance abuse, depression,  
14 anger management, suicidal ideation,  
15 PTSD, and anxiety. Trauma can affect the  
16 brain development of children and  
17 adolescents, and children that are  
18 traumatized are at risk for intellectual  
19 delays, impaired emotional regulation,  
20 and mental illness. You can reference  
21 the ACE study's adverse childhood  
22 experiences studies for that information.

23 Studies have shown that trauma  
24 as a whole is present and affects people  
25 from all different backgrounds and

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2 socioeconomic levels. However, people of  
3 color are often affected  
4 disproportionately and are less likely to  
5 seek treatment after a traumatic event.

6 Many of the neighborhoods and  
7 communities Northwest Victim Services  
8 serves are predominantly people of color.  
9 Since I've started working with this  
10 population and in the mental health field  
11 directly, I've noticed that there is  
12 often hesitation when it comes to people  
13 of color especially seeking help from  
14 outside providers and professionals. On  
15 a weekly basis, I assist with victims and  
16 witnesses outside of Courtroom 803, and  
17 I've had many interactions with people  
18 that have come to me and told me horrific  
19 stories about how they've been shot and  
20 stabbed and assaulted and abused, and  
21 when I extend that offer of counseling, a  
22 lot of times they'll say, I'm fine, I'm  
23 okay, I don't know, maybe another time.

24 So on that note, many victims  
25 and witnesses of crime are often

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2 apprehensive and reluctant to take  
3 advantage of counseling services for many  
4 reasons - fear of retaliation, culture,  
5 stigma, and mistrust of the system. This  
6 means that many people in Philadelphia  
7 may not have access to or feel  
8 comfortable enough to go to spaces where  
9 they can express, process, and heal their  
10 trauma. It also means that many people  
11 are attempting to cope with their pain in  
12 unhealthy ways. This is why we will need  
13 to see expansion and growth within Victim  
14 Services and the social services field in  
15 general. We will need to continue to  
16 create safe spaces in agencies that not  
17 only provide trauma-informed care but  
18 also crisis training, that encourages  
19 community partnerships, and outreach  
20 programs.

21 The primary question that I  
22 have that would need to be answered is,  
23 how do we establish not only access and  
24 availability but also trust between the  
25 community and survivor agencies?

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2 Thank you.

3 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Thank you.

4 I just have one question. When  
5 you talk about the fact that people don't  
6 want to go to these treatments, do you  
7 think that if we change the service model  
8 and bring the counselors to them, that  
9 there may be more of a willingness? I  
10 know that a lot of it has to do with just  
11 roadmapping your life and fitting that  
12 into all the other things. So maybe that  
13 could help get people to treatment a  
14 little bit more.

15 MS. HOWELL: Yeah, I would  
16 totally agree. And coming from a new  
17 insider's perspective, meeting people  
18 outside of the courtroom, their anxiety  
19 is at ten. So when you are presenting  
20 the services, it's like an automatic  
21 shutdown. They don't know who is around,  
22 who is listening, who is thinking -- who  
23 is saying what. And so I do believe that  
24 maybe having an outreach where people are  
25 mobile would be very helpful.

1 1/29/18 - SPECIAL COMMITTEE - RES. 160101

2 MS. NELSON: And you have to  
3 give them time to heal. Sometimes people  
4 won't take advantage of our services  
5 right after the victimization. And we're  
6 not a one-and-done agency. We're in our  
7 victims' lives for years to come.

8 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Do you also  
9 stay in their lives if they are on the  
10 other side of the system, meaning they  
11 have now offended? You know that they  
12 were a victim and you know some of the  
13 things they suffered and now they're  
14 offenders. Is there any like talking or  
15 anything?

16 MS. NELSON: So we understand  
17 the importance of being a community-based  
18 agency. So Northwest Victim Services is  
19 beginning to go into the restorative  
20 justice realm, if you will. There is --  
21 Movita spoke about it, saying that  
22 offenders -- I'm sorry. Some victims may  
23 want to speak to the offender. There is  
24 a victim offender dialogue where a victim  
25 can actually reach out to -- it's in

1 1/29/18 - SPECIAL COMMITTEE - RES. 160101  
2 Harrisburg. They can reach out to them  
3 and say I want to speak this offender,  
4 and I have been trained for this program,  
5 where the victim will go to the prison,  
6 where the victim is actually face to face  
7 with the offender, but the offender has  
8 to agree with it. It's great. We're in  
9 a room. It's just the offender, the  
10 victim, and then the two trained people  
11 who will be in the room with them, and  
12 they're able to -- whether they're going  
13 to talk, whether they're going to yell,  
14 whether they're going to curse, but they  
15 can't touch each other, but it is such a  
16 healing process.

17 So Northwest Victim Services  
18 understands the whole restorative justice  
19 piece, because for us to be able to make  
20 our community safer, we have to figure  
21 out why did this person do what they did,  
22 is there something going on. So how do  
23 we -- we have programs for the Victim  
24 Services when these things happen. They  
25 can come to Northwest Victim Services

1 1/29/18 - SPECIAL COMMITTEE - RES. 160101  
2 before these offenders, and we see young  
3 offenders. Why aren't we talking to  
4 them?

5 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: What do you  
6 think needs to happen -- I know you talk  
7 about you provide relocation funding.  
8 It's not a lot, so I don't know how far  
9 they can go, but if people can't live in  
10 their communities or they're living  
11 amongst the shooters who they see, why is  
12 that not being brought to any kind of  
13 attention? Like you'd rather live in  
14 this looking at this person, but you  
15 don't -- you can't tell anyone? Maybe  
16 you don't make the 911 call yourself, but  
17 they can't tell you? They can't tell  
18 anyone?

19 MS. NELSON: About the shooter?

20 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Yeah. Like  
21 you said, the grandmother was still  
22 living in the neighborhood and she saw  
23 the shooter.

24 MS. NELSON: Yeah. Mom is  
25 still living in that neighborhood.

1 1/29/18 - SPECIAL COMMITTEE - RES. 160101

2 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: And she  
3 sees the shooter?

4 MS. NELSON: She sees the  
5 shooter. So they picked up someone, but  
6 he wasn't someone that they can hold.

7 We have two things that we can  
8 look at for relocation. I do know that  
9 the District Attorney's Office, under  
10 unique circumstances, may do relocation,  
11 but then as you heard Jeff, when we file  
12 a claim, then we can file a claim for  
13 relocation. It's only \$1,000 and it's  
14 reimbursable. So the person has to spend  
15 that thousand dollars first.

16 So we see victims, not only  
17 Northwest Victim Services, all the victim  
18 agencies, we see victims where our hearts  
19 bleed because they don't have the money  
20 to move. And think about somebody who is  
21 in the house. What is \$1,000 going to  
22 do? It's not going to do anything. So  
23 we've been fighting for something to help  
24 these victims for relocation, and nothing  
25 has been done.



1 1/29/18 - SPECIAL COMMITTEE - RES. 160101

2 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Is there  
3 something to empower people to take back  
4 their neighborhood? I mean, because it's  
5 not everyone -- even in neighborhoods  
6 that have been labeled high crime, not  
7 everyone in those neighborhoods are  
8 committing crimes, because there are  
9 people that call the police.

10 MS. NELSON: Right. Exactly.

11 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Instead of  
12 everyone trying to move somewhere where I  
13 don't know where they're going to move,  
14 because there's only -- \$1,000 or \$2,000  
15 is only going to take them but so far.  
16 Where is there to work with the  
17 communities that if you see the shooter,  
18 I see the shooter, we're all in the same  
19 block and we keep looking at this  
20 shooter, what can we do to take back our  
21 neighborhood so that this one person  
22 doesn't have us all hostage?

23 MS. NELSON: So that's a very  
24 important question, and I'm sure you  
25 know, Mr. Bethel, in working with the

1 1/29/18 - SPECIAL COMMITTEE - RES. 160101  
2 Police Department that's a loaded  
3 question, because the no snitch rule is  
4 real.

5 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: It changes  
6 a whole different -- if two people  
7 committing a crime and you go down and I  
8 snitch on you, the fact that you shot my  
9 kid and I'm watching you every day,  
10 that's not snitching.

11 MS. NELSON: True. Right. And  
12 so if the neighbors say it but nobody is  
13 willing to come forth to say anything.

14 Now, mom has gone to the Police  
15 Department, but they're saying they don't  
16 have enough evidence to get this person.  
17 But then you have that, where these  
18 residents, they know who did it, but they  
19 won't say anything, because they're in  
20 fear of their lives and their children's  
21 lives.

22 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Thank you.

23 MS. NELSON: You're welcome.

24 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: I really  
25 appreciate the two of you coming to share

1 1/29/18 - SPECIAL COMMITTEE - RES. 160101  
2 your information. I think it was very  
3 informative for me because I didn't know  
4 all of these things existed, and I'm glad  
5 that you're looking at new ways to  
6 deliver these services to people before  
7 they sit with my office across the table.

8 I think that concludes our  
9 hearing for today. I know you've been --

10 (Audience member talking  
11 without microphone.)

12 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: I  
13 apologize. I think we ran over a lot.

14 (Audience member talking  
15 without microphone.)

16 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: Do you have  
17 prepared statements that you can send  
18 in --

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

20 MS. BRADFORD-GREY: -- that  
21 maybe we can incorporate into our record?

22 I'm really sorry about that. I  
23 think we ran over our time. I apologize,  
24 but we're going to have to end the  
25 hearing today. So I really do apologize,

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1 1/29/18 - SPECIAL COMMITTEE - RES. 160101  
2 but we will make sure we get all of your  
3 information and incorporate that into our  
4 record.

5 Thank you.

6 (Special Committee on Criminal  
7 Justice Reform concluded at 1:40 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the proceedings, evidence and objections are contained fully and accurately in the stenographic notes taken by me upon the foregoing matter, and that this is a true and correct transcript of same.

-----  
MICHELE L. MURPHY  
RPR-Notary Public

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