

# Opinion: Louisville mayor, next police chief need to champion an end to gun violence

By Christopher 2X

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Gun violence is at an all-time high in Louisville.

Not even halfway through November, we've had 143 homicides — 22 percent more than the previous annual record set in 2017. More than 50 people a month are getting hit by non-fatal gunfire — double the gun violence in a typical year.

These are not just numbers. There are lives and families with young kids shattered, unable to cope and achieve in school. Our entire city is at risk with this level of devastation, and no issue should be more important than ending the bloodshed.

Thankfully, law enforcement, business and faith leaders, Metro Council, and the Mayor's office, recently endorsed an ambitious, new plan to drastically reduce gun violence in Louisville.

As Mayor Greg Fischer considers his choice for a new police chief, Louisville's Group Violence Intervention plan, funded largely through private donations, needs to move forward with focus and full-hearted commitment from the mayor and LMPD to succeed.

The effort is directed by David M. Kennedy, director of the National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, with extensive involvement of community partners.

Kennedy's approach, successful in other cities, recognizes that we cannot arrest or prosecute our way out of a gun violence problem, that young members of violent groups are among the most vulnerable of citizens and as a city, we have not done enough to protect and support them.

The work brings together police, social service agencies and community representatives, including victims of violent crimes, with at-risk youth and young adults who are members of violent groups and are typically on parole.

Police and prosecutors explain the consequences of continued criminal activity and social service organizations provide links to services they may need such as job counseling.

Ex-offenders, faith leaders and victims of violent crime talk straight to them about the impacts of gun violence in their lives and neighborhoods. These powerful testimonials can impart the real pain of violence and the loss of normalcy it brings for kids and entire neighborhoods. A mother might explain how her child lives in fear and can't play outside because she's afraid she'll be hit by random gunfire. Another parent might describe her son's trauma of being pressured to join a group out of fear he'll be retaliated against if he says no.

For at-risk youth in the GVI program, a real offer of help, a way forward to a productive life, will be extended to those who want to succeed.

On a broader scale, GVI can help us address racial injustice because too many families in predominately minority communities feel unsafe and have suffered because of gun violence. Too many kids are traumatized to the point where they can't function in school.

We cannot afford to continue failing so many of our children and youth because of gun violence.

With a strong and lasting commitment from Mayor Fischer and the next police chief to the GVI effort, Louisville can be a safer place for everyone, especially our kids. They deserve nothing less than the opportunity to live in peace.