

## After string of Madison-area shootings, community groups ask elected officials for help reducing gun violence



- JOHN HART -- State Journal

Madison School District students hold signs indicating proposals designed to curb violence as community leaders, elected officials and members of the Dane County Boys and Girls Club announce a 15-point "community action plan" to curb recent violence in Madison during a news conference Monday at the Allied Boys and Girls Club in Fitchburg. From left are Aajiyah Vance, 12, Kami Henning, 17, and Latavia Taylor, 17.



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Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, embraces a well-wisher after local leaders announced plans to involve the community and police in joint efforts to stop the type of retaliatory violence that has shaken Madison in recent weeks.

Conflict resolution training, increased employment opportunities and a gun buy-back program are among 15 ideas being offered by leaders from local nonprofits and black churches in response to a rash of shooting deaths in the Madison area.

Boys and Girls Club of Dane County CEO Michael Johnson gathered black community leaders and elected officials Monday in Fitchburg, just a block from Madison's Allied Drive neighborhood to unveil a plan to curb violence. The plan targets racial disparities in education, employment and health, but also aims to grow cooperation with police in mitigating the prominence of gangs.

"When you look at the disparities that exist in this community — disparities in education, mass incarceration — if we don't begin to address these issues, it's going to be a long summer," Johnson said. "I want to encourage this community: If not this plan, what plan will you rally around to make sure that our kids are safe?"

“In this community, we announce way too many initiatives that we don’t put any money behind. That has to stop,” he said.

Johnson said it’s time for elected officials to stop “over-studying” racial-disparity problems and start funding solutions to them. His challenge comes after a string of three homicides in less than a month.

The series of homicides started early April 19, when Martez Moore, 30, of Madison, was shot after a disturbance in the parking lot of a Far West Side bar.

Three weeks later, Madison Police Chief Mike Koval said Darius Haynes, 38, of Madison, was “summarily executed” last Tuesday as he sat in a car at a Verona Road gas station.

The next day, Elijah James Washington III, 28, also of Madison, was fatally shot at a gas station in the town of Madison.

The suspect in the third shooting, Kortney D. Moore, 28, of Madison, is the brother of the victim in the first.

Johnson’s proposals to mitigate violence include:

- Offering gang members jobs or job training opportunities in exchange for a cease-fire.
- Creating a citizen-led program that would work with police and other community groups on violence prevention.
- Offering a \$10,000 reward for information that leads to an arrest and conviction in homicide cases.
- Holding a gun buy-back program twice a year that would offer \$250 for handguns and \$500 for semi-automatic weapons.
- Creating an intervention program with life and career coaching for young men.
- Hiring former gang members to do outreach between police and people vulnerable to becoming gang members.
- Creating a fund to provide assistance and protection from retaliation to people willing to help police.
- Expand access to “culturally competent” mental health services.
- Supporting a comprehensive violence prevention plan that includes prevention, intervention, enforcement, rehabilitation and re-entry programs for offenders.
- Funding community outreach workers and expanded hours for community centers.
- Creating a universal violence prevention program for schools and reducing out-of-school

suspensions.

- Lobbying to address factors that lead to crime and violence, such as unemployment, income inequality and education.
- Implementing a re-entry program for nonviolent offenders to learn a trade and take anger management classes.
- Expanding substance abuse treatment.
- Teaching children and their parents conflict-resolution strategies from a young age.

Johnson was joined at Monday's event by a slew of elected officials, including state Rep. Melissa Sargent, Madison Aids. Shiva Bidar-Sielaff and Mark Clear, and Fitchburg Mayor Steve Arnold.

Johnson acknowledged property tax dollars are strained, but said local governments and nonprofit groups should focus on other funding mechanisms, such as soda or cigarettes taxes, or consider creating a government office that would work with nonprofit groups to secure federal grants and philanthropic dollars. "We're leaving money on the table because we don't have advancement people bringing in those federal dollars to support our community programs," he said.

Madison Aids. Maurice Cheeks, 10th District, and Matt Phair, 20th District, on Monday announced plans to unveil their own "evidence-based violence prevention initiatives" and other city budget recommendations targeting youth violence before Tuesday's City Council meeting.

Cheeks said the initiatives are based on best practices in other cities and had been in the works for months prior to the streak of gun violence.

"Ald. Phair and I represent districts that have been certainly affected over the course of our time in office by violence, and in some cases gun-related violence," Cheeks said.

"We were planning to make it public in some way, but given current events, we felt like it was important to take extra measures to ensure that the community knew the council was working on proactive measure to address root causes of violence."

Cheeks declined to comment on the content of the initiatives until Tuesday. Johnson said he has seen them and added that they are in line with the goals of his 15-point plan.