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EDITOR'S PICK SPOTLIGHT

Focused Interruption Coalition hopes Paul Soglin's financial support will open funding 'floodgate'

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Michael Johnson, CEO for the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County, along with members of the Focused Interruption Coalition, group speaks during Mayor Paul Soglin's press conference on Oct. 4, 2016.

A grassroots group that aims to enact 15 steps to address racial disparities, recidivism and violence in the community hopes Madison Mayor Paul Soglin's proposed budget allocation will influence others to contribute funding.

Soglin included \$400,000 in his proposed 2017 operating specifically for the Focused Interruption Coalition's 15-point framework that is a combination of plans from Aids. Maurice Cheeks, District 10, and Matt Phair, District 20, and Dane County Boys and Girls Club CEO Michael Johnson.

Caliph Muab'El, a member of the coalition and a local community organizer, said he appreciated Soglin's funding commitment, although he said this is the first step in a "long uphill battle."

"We were pleased that the mayor took the first step in showing he cares about the community and that we're not placed on a backburner as a people anymore," Muab'El said.

The group originally requested nearly double the amount the mayor allocated and estimates the entire plan would cost about \$3 million over several years with funding expected to come from a variety of sources.

Muab'el said he hopes the mayor's commitment will inspire other philanthropic groups and the county to financially back the 15-point plan.

"We definitely need as many resources as possible to make the dramatic changes we're intending to make," Muab'el said.

Soglin's budget also directs the City Council's Organizational Committee to determine how to allocate the funding, which Ald. Mike Verveer, District 4, said is a first.

Muab'el said he and coalition members plan to be involved in discussing how to allocate the funding and are focused first on recruiting and training peer support coaches for violence prevention and recidivism reduction and starting the Madison Peace Project, based off of a similar program in Milwaukee. The peace project initiative would engage young people between the ages of 8 and 18 to submit proposals on how to reduce violence in their community.

Phair, who has worked closely with the coalition, said he is skeptical that the mayor's budget does not specify which initiatives would be funded by the \$400,000 and would like see a language change. Overall, he said the mayor's budget allocation is a "giant step forward."

"The coalition, the community should feel very happy (to) essentially get, if not in name anyway, get funding for their proposal, at least half of it," Phair said. "That's a win. I just think that we can certainly make it better."

The full list of initiatives includes:

- Recruit and train peer support coaches for violence prevention
- Recruit and train peer support coaches for recidivism reduction
- Madison Peace Project
- Awards and Protection for Witnesses
- Youth Employment
- Mentoring
- Create a Restoration Center
- Expansion of Community Center Hours
- Alternative Sentencing
- Mental Health Therapy
- Lobby for Policies that Address Social Determinants of Violence
- Remove Offenses on CCAP
- Court Advocacy
- Collaboration with Madison Out of School Time and the Madison Metropolitan School District
- Functional Family Therapy and Parent Management Training

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Abigail Becker joined The Capital Times in 2016, where she primarily covers city and county government. She previously worked for the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism and the Wisconsin State Journal.



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