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Johnson sharply criticizes Soglin for taking credit on 'rapid response team' deployment

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PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

Michael Johnson

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At a Wednesday press conference, Madison Mayor Paul Soglin said the city sent a new "rapid response team" to the scene of a shooting on East Washington Avenue Tuesday.

A day later, Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, took issue with Soglin's remarks.

"This is one big lie!!!!" Johnson wrote on Facebook Thursday. "That team was Anthony Cooper and myself who was at the hospital the other night until about midnight and we need to stop window dressing these issues if we are going to solve these problems."

Anthony Cooper, Sr., is director of reentry services for Nehemiah Center for Urban Leadership Development and a member of the Focused Interruption Coalition. He and Johnson often

In an interview with Madison365.com, Johnson clarified his position, but did not back off his criticism of Soglin.

"(Soglin) did not dispatch us out there," Johnson said in the interview. "We went out there on our own ... The mayor responded as if he dispatched the team. That's misleading. Anthony was already in route when (Deputy Mayor Gloria Reyes) called him."

At his Wednesday press conference, Soglin said his office sent the team to the scene to gain the trust of individuals involved in the incident and obtain more information.

"Because of the urgency last night we did deploy (the team)," Soglin said.

Tuesday's shooting took place at about 7:40 p.m. at PDQ, located at 3528 E. Washington Ave., according to Madison police. The victim sustained non-life threatening injuries and was taken to a hospital.

The incident was the latest in a run of gun-related incidents in the city. There have been more shots fired and weapons offenses in the first four months of this year than in 2016.

Following violent incidents, Soglin said members of the "rapid response team" would help relocate people for their safety, assist with funeral arrangements, connect people with support services. The program is a result of \$400,000 budgeted by the city in response to the Focused Interruption Coalition's 15-point plan to reduce violence.

A number of individuals from community organizations and partners attended a public meeting on the new team last Friday. Ald. Sheri Carter, District 14, said the number of people who attended the meeting and the dedication to the new group is "phenomenal."

"We need to embrace this on all fronts," Ald. Sheri Carter, District 14, said. "The bottom line is most of us know our neighborhood and know our residents. We can touch them at a whole different level."

Police Capt. Jim Wheeler said it is necessary that the community and police department work together. He said he viewed Tuesday's incident as a trial run to how the program will work.

"We are still working on this but ... we know we need to get something done now," Wheeler said. "Let's pool our resources and direct them to those who need it immediately."

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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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