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To: Cook County Board of Commissioners

From: Avik Das, Executive Director of the Justice Advisory Council 

Re: Report for 1.19.22 Joint Health and Hospitals & Criminal Justice Committee

Meeting: County-Wide Anti-Violence Strategy

Date: January 14, 2022

The Justice Advisory Council is honored to participate in the Joint Health & Hospitals and Criminal Justice Committee on Violence Prevention. As the agency charged with supporting the development and implementation of the Cook County Board President's criminal justice reform agenda, the high levels of crime and violence in our county are of paramount concern for the Justice Advisory Council. We thank Commissioners Lowry, Deer and Moore for convening the committee via resolution 22-0618.

The JAC brings to this meeting, all available resources and expertise as well as a strong commitment to collaborate and innovate to progress toward a shared goal of curbing community violence. In this report, we will provide brief responses to the fundamental questions posed for the initial committee meeting on January 19th, 2022.

What has the Justice Advisory Council done previously to address violence and crime in Cook County?

The mission of the Justice Advisory Council is to promote equitable, human-centered, community-driven justice system innovation and practice. We carry out this mission through four main areas of focus: policy work, service coordination, community engagement, and grantmaking. While these areas inform one another and each represents an important aspect of our work, our presentation will focus on our grants portfolio of services focused on addressing the underlying root causes that contribute to violence in Cook County.

Our grantmaking strategy reflects our commitment to "Safe and Thriving" communities, as highlighted in the Office of the President's Strategic Plan Policy Roadmap. The services within our grants portfolio variously contribute to community safety, reduce violence, and decrease reliance on the criminal justice system. Grant programs directly support our communities that have suffered from historic disinvestment, and individuals disproportionately impacted by crime, violence, and the justice system.

The legacy grant portfolio built by the JAC has an annual allocation of approximately \$14 million per year and over the past 10 years, the JAC has stewarded over \$50 million dollars in investment through grantmaking. Our major categories of funding are Violence Prevention, Recidivism Reduction, Restorative justice, Services for Returning Residents and Employment Services for Emerging Adults. The largest funding categories are Violence Prevention and Services for Returning Residents, at an annual allocation of approximately \$7 million and \$4 million respectively. Currently, the JAC is funding over 100 community-based service providers with this grant portfolio.



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The JAC's service providers primarily operate in geographic areas of the County experiencing high levels of violence and contact with the justice system. These areas generally include the south and west areas of the city and suburbs. The investments in these areas reflect emerging research on best and promising practices, feedback from residents and service providers, and close attention to data on violence, homicides, and justice system involvement.

What does the Justice Advisory Council currently do to address violence and crime, specifically the recent surges in gun-related violence and carjackings, in Cook County?

The JAC continues to provide grant funding and support to community-based services providers working to address the root causes of violence in our communities and support those at high risk of committing or experiencing violence, including justice system-involved youth and adults. The grant portfolio of the JAC has grown along with the need for these programs. In 2015, our annual allocation was approximately \$5 million which has grown to over \$14 million today. This includes \$5 million invested in the work of Communities Partners 4 Peace, a collective of over 15 agencies working together across the city in street outreach, violence interruption, and case management with supportive services. In the summer of 2021, the JAC portfolio included responded to the ongoing challenges of the pandemic and rising violence with "summer grants" totaling \$1.5 million providing group work, vocational and behavioral health support, and basic needs assistance, including housing support. With over 100 grantees, the JAC portfolio represents promising, impactful services that are relied upon by our residents and communities in their efforts to be safe and to thrive. However, we recognize that rising gun violence, in particular, demands focused attention and additional investment builds upon the work being done across the city, county and state, with government and philanthropic resources.

The JAC embraces a holistic definition of Violence Prevention, informed by research and guidance from our partners at the IL Criminal Justice Info Authority. Our Violence Prevention programs address risk factors that lead to involvement in acts of violence. Foundational strategies leveraged in these VP programs are street outreach & violence interruption, mental health and therapeutic services, education and employment support, and individualized services such as mentoring and case management.

It is of vital importance to us that the programs we support are *evidence informed* and *community affirmed*. Quantitative and qualitative data show that VP programs are effective in reducing violence. For example, preliminary data from a recent [Northwestern University study](#) of a street outreach Violence Prevention program on the South Side, shows for program participants, gunshot injuries decreased by approximately 50%. Yet just as important, is the fact that program participants, family members, neighbors, service providers, faith organizations and local officials all echo support for these programs. The JAC's own community engagement work has shown the continued need for services in impacted communities and currently, the needs far surpass the resources available.

How the Justice Advisory Council previously collaborated with other County offices, departments, and/or bureaus? And does it continue its collaboration?

The Justice Advisory Council is uniquely positioned to work collaboratively in criminal justice and public safety spaces. Working closely with the Office of the President, the JAC helps to implement the president's criminal justice and equity policy priorities, and steward investments. The JAC also acts as a bridge to promote coordination and strategic criminal justice planning among Cook County's Criminal Justice Stakeholder agencies. Under the President's leadership, this historical collaboration has been ongoing for



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nearly a decade and has increased especially over the past two years, starting with jail depopulation efforts in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Collaboration continues as we plan across agencies for the allocation and disbursement of American Rescue Plan Act Funds and the implementation of the Pretrial Fairness Act. The pandemic has placed a spotlight on public health and how personal and community safety and wellness intersects with broad access to quality mental and behavioral health services. Accordingly, the JAC has worked closely with CCH and CCDPH to identify opportunities for collaboration across justice and health systems that target those most at risk of being impacted by or committing violence.

The JAC has also cultivated partnerships with state entities such as the Illinois Criminal Justice Information authority and now with the Illinois Department of Human Services newly formed Office of Firearm Violence Prevention . These partnerships will serve us as we continue to develop Violence Prevention strategies for Cook County. Looking forward, we see additional room for collaboration with county entities such as Cook County Health, as well as the city and suburban municipalities.

What resources does the Justice Advisory Council need to assist in combating the surge in violent crime and support your continued efforts?

To support the continued growth of our Violence Preventing grantmaking, the JAC will onboard additional staff to help manage grants and support service provider organizations. Grant monitors and a data analyst will allow us to provide the oversight, support and analysis needed to sustainably scale up our grantmaking capabilities. The JAC also plans to collaborate with the Office of the President to focus on research and evaluation of these programs. Through reporting and site visits, we know our grantee organizations run high-quality effective programs that change lives and reduce crime and violence. We look forward to the capacity to illustrate their success more widely. Beyond this, the awareness, support and partnership of our elected officials will be invaluable as we work collaboratively to curb the epidemic of community violence.