



**King County**

**Metropolitan King County Council  
Committee of the Whole**

**STAFF REPORT**

<b>Agenda Item:</b>	8	<b>Name:</b>	Sam Porter
<b>Proposed No.:</b>	2020-0005	<b>Date:</b>	February 24, 2019

**SUBJECT**

Proposed Motion 2020-0005 would accept the report on gun violence among youth and young adults submitted in compliance with Motion 15234.

**SUMMARY**

Proposed Motion 2020-0005 would accept the Executive's report on gun violence among youth and young adults that was requested through Motion 15234. The report that appears in Attachment A to the Proposed Motion was received on December 12, 2019. Motion 15234 described the required procedure for development and contents for the report as follows:

*A. The executive is requested to engage and collaborate with King County children and young adults and their family members to develop a report on gun violence amongst youth and young adults.*

*B. The executive should engage and collaborate with King County youth and young adults that are either at-risk of or have experience with the issue of gun violence.*

*C. The executive should use engagement and collaboration methods that may include, but not be limited to, individual and family interviews, focus groups and community meetings.*

*D. The youth and young adult report should include, but not be limited to, the following:*

*1. A comprehensive inventory of existing county programs that focus on youth violence prevention and intervention and other community-based efforts in the county, such as Best Starts for Kids, Community Correction, Juvenile Justice Data and the Family Intervention and Restorative Services Program, which is also known as FIRS, Gang Violence Intervention and Prevention initiatives and the Gun Violence Prevention Initiative; and*

*2. Methods and findings from the interviews and focus groups with youth, young adults, their families and providers who work with youth and their families on issues related to gun violence.*

*E. The youth and young adult report should inform recommendations and strategies to prevent youth and young adult gun violence.*

*F. The executive should present the findings in the youth and young adult report to the following:*

*1. Youth, young adults and their family members who participated in focus groups, interviews and community meetings;*

*2. The King County Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention Committee that includes representatives of law enforcement, civic groups and the King County prosecuting attorney's office;*

*3. Existing county programs that focus on youth violence prevention and intervention and other community-based efforts in the county that impact youth and young adults such as Best Starts for Kids and Zero Youth Detention;*

*4. The juvenile justice equity steering committee; and*

*5. Other county committee or task force charged with developing recommendations and strategies to prevent youth and young adult gun violence.*

*G. The executive should develop recommendations on how the county can support and strengthen community-based organizations' efforts to curb gun violence.*

*H. The executive should develop a final comprehensive report that includes the youth and young adult report and the recommendations as mentioned in sections E. and G. of this motion and transmit the report, and a motion accepting the report, by October 1, 2019.*

The report appears to be responsive to Motion 15234.

## **BACKGROUND**

King County Council passed Motion 15234 in October 2018, requesting the executive to engage and collaborate with King County youth and young adults and their families to develop a report on youth gun violence. An expenditure restriction of \$180,000 was included in the Public Health appropriation during the 2019 second supplemental budget<sup>1</sup> to support the development of this report including one term-limited temporary employee position.

### ***Firearm Violence Among Youth and Young Adults***

The January 21, 2014 Annals of Internal Medicine report finds that adolescents, between the ages of ten and nineteen years, with access to firearms are 2.6 times as likely to die by suicide as adolescents without access to firearms. The December 2008 Journal of Adolescent Health study of adolescent (between the ages of ten and nineteen years) suicides by firearm found that over half were carried out with firearms from the adolescent's home. More than 75 percent of firearms used in suicide attempts

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<sup>1</sup> Ordinance 19021

and unintentional injuries were stored in the residence of the victim, a relative, or friend.<sup>2</sup>

According to data from the Center for Homeland Defense and Security at the United States Naval Postgraduate School, since 2010, 16 school shootings have occurred in Washington State.<sup>3</sup> During the 2015-2016 school year, the Washington state Superintendent of Public Instruction reported 130 incidents involving a firearm on school premises, transportation systems or school facilities, which resulted in 62 suspensions and 30 expulsions and, of these, 21 suspensions and 15 expulsions were in school districts located in King County.<sup>4</sup> In addition, according to the Washington State Healthy Youth Survey, in 2016, 11 percent of eighth-grade students, 16 percent of tenth-grade students and 23 percent of twelfth-grade students in King County reported that they would not be caught if they carried a handgun without parental permission.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, according to the same survey, in 2016, four percent of King County tenth-grade and twelfth-grade students reported having carried a gun on at least one day during the last thirty days.

According to the Youth and Young Adult Gun Violence Report, approximately three-fourths of the suicide deaths among youth ages 10–14 result from firearms. Firearm homicide rates are highest among young adults ages 18–24 compared to other age groups.<sup>6 7</sup>

## **ANALYSIS**

The report includes five main components meeting the request described in Motion 15234: engagement and collaboration with youth, young adults, their families; an inventory of existing county programs; methods and findings; recommendations and strategies to prevent youth and young adult gun violence; and presenting the findings to specific stakeholders.

### **Engagement, Collaboration, and Methods for Research**

Community outreach was conducted between June and August 2019 as part of the development of the report included:

- Twelve focus groups with 80 youth and young adults who have experience with gun violence;
- Two focus groups with 26 family members of youth and young adult affected by gun violence; and

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> K-12 School Shooting Database, Naval Postgraduate School <https://www.chds.us/ssdb/incidents-in-the-united-states-2010-present/>

<sup>4</sup> Public Health – Seattle & King County: Guns in our community, <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/violence-injury-prevention/violence-prevention/gun-violence/LOK-IT-UP/firearm-facts.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Youth and Young Adult Gun Violence Report, Attachment A to Proposed Motion 2020-0005.

<sup>7</sup> Washington State Department of Health. Community Health Assessment Tool (CHAT) Data, self-inflicted death youth 0–24 years, 2015–2017.

- Ten key informant interviews with service providers and local experts who work with youth and their families on issues related to gun violence.

Thirteen focus groups were conducted in English, and one in Spanish. Participants were recruited from all King County regions, racial/ethnic groups and ages. Participants represented three (East region, Seattle, and South region) of the four regions in King County.<sup>8</sup> Table 1 on page 16 of the report shows the demographic characteristics of the 106 focus group participants. This information is also presented in Appendix B of the report. Eighty of the participants were youth and young adults, and 26 were family members. The average age of youth participants was 17.3 years, 73 percent were male, 65 percent were Black or African American, 14 percent identified as multiple races, 66 percent have known someone that carries a gun, and 62 percent has known someone who has been shot or injured by a gun.

The stakeholder interviews were conducted with King County staff from the Prosecuting Attorney's Office (PAO), Executive's Office, and the Department of Community and Health Services. Mental Health and School Service Providers were interviewed as well as community activists, advocates, and organizers. Academic researchers were also interviewed.

According to the report, "The questions used to guide focus group discussions and key informant interviews were informed by existing studies in New York<sup>9</sup> and Connecticut<sup>10</sup>, a literature review, and the research team. Questions focused on A) risk and protective factors related to firearm violence for homicide and suicide, B) how youth and communities understand and access firearms, and C) recommendations for preventing gun violence." A list of the questions used in the interviews and focus groups can be seen on page 18 of the report.

The research team audio-recorded the focus groups, transcribed the recordings and deleted the audio files after incorporating the notes and removed all personal identifying information. The transcripts were reviewed for common and unique themes that best represented the topics, coded, then analyzed. In order to ensure validity of the findings PHSKC presented these findings to available participants from the focus groups and provider interviews, representatives from civic groups, local law enforcement, staff from the PAO, and other existing county and community-based programs that focus on youth violence prevention and intervention.

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<sup>8</sup> According to page 17 of the report, "The research team was unable to contact a focus group in the North region despite making an attempt to do so."

<sup>9</sup> The Gun Epidemic Reconsidered: Creating a Foundation to Reduce Firearm Violence Among Urban Youth. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://nij.ojp.gov/funding/awards/2016-ij-cx-0008>

<sup>10</sup> Understanding Youth Violence in New Haven: A Photovoice Project with Youth of New Haven. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.ctdatahaven.org/data-resources/understanding-youth-violence-new-haven-photovoice-project-youth-new-haven>.

## Findings

The report indicates that the most significant theme across outreach and engagement for youth experiencing firearm violence through suicide and homicide is that the everyday circumstances of youth and their environments are strong influences on their decisions to engage in gun violence. Additional key findings include:

- A. King County youth are growing up in environments of pervasive violent imagery and societal norms that normalize gun violence.
- B. Community conditions can moderate or contribute to a youth's involvement with gun violence.
- C. Mental health, adolescent brain development, and messages about masculinity may influence a youth's decision to engage in gun violence.
- D. Easy access to guns contributes to gun violence among youth.
- E. Cultural factors such as popular culture (entertainment, music, and video games), social media, and mass media, can associate guns with looking "cool" or attracting fame and attention. These depictions of guns tend to exaggerate the actual prevalence of guns and gun violence.
- F. Community conditions including both affluence and poverty can place stress on youth. Furthermore, racism and discrimination may lead to a sense of powerlessness and some youth may turn to gun violence as a result of this anxiety.
- G. Adolescent brain development is associated with poor decision-making, and adolescent males may react strongly to expectations about masculinity. These factors increase youth susceptibility to gun violence.
- H. Guns are easily accessible, and youth can often access guns either through their peer networks or household members who keep guns at home. Young adults expressed that existing laws do not present a significant barrier to obtaining guns legally, noting that it is easier to get a gun than to get a job.

The report includes quotes from participants throughout pages 20-26 of the report.

## Existing County Program Inventory

The report includes an inventory of existing youth violence prevention, intervention, and other community-based efforts in the county. These are categorized and listed below. Detailed information about each can be seen on pages 11 through 15 of the report and websites are listed in Appendix D to the report on pages 47 and 48.

### Initiatives and programs building protective factors for youth

- Corner Greeters (Rainier Beach Action Coalition)
- Youth 4 Peace Project (student-led)
- Healthy Othello Safer Through Environmental Design (community-led)
- Best Starts for Kids (BSK)
  - Stopping the School-to-Prison Pipeline
  - Communities of Opportunity

- King County's Zero Youth Detention Initiative
- PHSKC Lock It Up Program

#### Suicide prevention and intervention programs

All suicides of minors are reviewed in PHSKC's Child Death Review (CDR), convened and managed through the Parent-Child Health Program.

King County's Mental Illness and Drug Dependency (MIDD) sales tax funds behavioral health services, including Mental Health First Aid where community members can learn behavioral health basics including warning signs to recognize and respond when someone is in a behavioral health crisis. MIDD also funds the Children's Crisis Outreach Services (CCORS) and related expansion programs. CCORS helps families achieve stability during a crisis, helps prevent future crises, and helps children remain in their home. Clinicians meet families and children where they are and conduct behavioral risk assessment including suicide risk, and link children and families with short-term community-based supports.

#### Violence prevention and intervention programs

- The PAO Crime Strategies Unit compiles data about shots fired in King County law enforcement jurisdictions where the majority of reported firearm misuse occurs.
- The PAO supports programming by CHOOSE 180 that focuses on youth and young adults at first contact with the juvenile legal system or when risk factors are present.
- Juvenile Court's Partnership for Youth Justice diverts youth from the criminal legal system and connects them with community supports.
- Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program diverts individuals who are engaged in low-level drug crime, prostitution, and crimes of poverty away from the criminal legal system and connects them with case managers who provide long-term wraparound services and supports.
- BSK's Theft 3 and Mall Safety Pilot Program at Southcenter Mall allows police officers an alternative to filing charges to allow youth who commit property damage to take accountability for charges without court and jail involvement.<sup>11</sup>
- Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention's Community Corrections Division provides pretrial and sentenced alternatives to secure confinement.
- PAO's Family Intervention and Restorative Services (FIRS) program for youth who have perpetrated family violence. FIRS offers alternatives to secure detention, as well as de-escalation counseling to safely reunite youth with their families at no cost. Families are offered in-home family counseling, behavioral health services, drug and alcohol services, and the Step-Up Program, which specifically addresses adolescent family violence.

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<sup>11</sup> Kent Police Department Diversion, <https://www.strongchildren.org/programs-diversion>

- Community Empowered Disposition Alternative and Resolution (C.E.D.A.R.) navigators for certain first-time juvenile felony offenders that allows for early acceptance of responsibility and provides positive incentive to engage with community resources and support.
- King County Juvenile Court's Restorative Mediation pilot project.
- MIDD Funded
  - Aggression Replacement Therapy (ART), a group intervention for youth,
  - Functional Family Therapy (FFT)
  - Multi-Systemic Therapy/Family Integrated Transition (MST/FIT)
- King County Credible Messengers Initiative pairs youth involved in, or at risk of involvement in, the criminal legal system with adult mentors who have comparable lived experience.
- Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ) leads an initiative to prevent gang violence in Seattle and King County and their Youth Leadership, Intervention & Change program (LINC) aims to unite partners to redirect youth gang involvement.
- Safe Futures Youth Center provides prevention and intervention programs and services to reduce gang involvement, involvement in the juvenile legal system, school truancy and school dropout rates.
- YMCA's Alive and Free program performs gang and violence prevention by using outreach workers to connect youth to community-based resources.

### **Recommendations and Strategies**

Motion 15234 requested that the executive should develop recommendations on how the county can support and strengthen community-based organizations' efforts to curb gun violence.

The community recommendations gathered during the focus groups and key informant interviews are described in the report beginning on page 28 through 31 and briefly summarized as follows:

- Increase education about gun violence for youth, families and community members.
- Increase range and scope of community centers to provide a safe, accessible place to connect with supportive adults and peers.
- Increase youth access to behavioral and mental health services to address the impact of stress, trauma.
- Provide social-emotional skills training to youth facilitated by peers or relatable adults on topics including coping with varied emotions, conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques, how to seek help during difficult times, problem solving, and leadership skills.
- Increase youth employment and educational opportunities and make internships and meaningful employment available to youth in communities affected by gun violence.

- Examine and address youth's ability to easily access guns including young people's ability to use social media, particularly Snapchat, to buy or borrow firearms.
- Develop increased systems alignment between government and community supports including taking a more participatory approach to planning.

Recommendations on how the county can support and strengthen community-based organizations' efforts to curb gun violence appear on page 34 of the report and include the following:

- A. The County should broadly disseminate the findings of this report to governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to ensure that County gun violence prevention efforts are aligned with community recommendations.
- B. County agencies should help community-based organizations seek and obtain external funding to support the expansion of existing community-based programs targeting youth and their families.
- C. In developing their implementation strategies, Zero Youth Detention (ZYP), should take into consideration the report findings and demonstrate how the findings are being addressed, such as the expansion of restorative justice practices and connecting youth to community supports prior to engagement with the criminal legal system.
- D. The County should continue to use and strengthen a trauma-informed approach to working with youth involved in gun violence.
- E. The County should continue to generate qualitative and quantitative data reports with input from affected communities and providers to inform policy and programmatic efforts to address gun violence.
- F. The County should continue to disseminate accurate, accessible information to community members about the use of firearms and safe storage practices and services that mediate the risk and impact of gun violence.
- G. The County should increase internship and employment opportunities for youth in communities heavily affected by gun violence.
- H. The County should support a regional network of leaders committed to creating safe, healthy and hopeful communities to help reduce the epidemic of homicides and shootings among County residents.

## **Presentations**

Once developed, Motion 15234 requested that the executive should present the findings of the report to the following:

- Youth, young adults, and their family members who participated in focus groups, interviews and community meetings;
- The King County Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention Committee that includes representatives of law enforcement, civic groups and the King County prosecuting attorney's office;
- Existing county programs that focus on youth violence prevention and intervention and other community-based efforts in the county that impact youth and young adults such as Best Starts for Kids and Zero Youth Detention;



- The juvenile justice equity steering committee; and
- Other county committee or task force charged with developing recommendations and strategies to prevent youth and young adult gun violence.

The report indicates that eight report back sessions were conducted with stakeholders and available community members who participated in focus groups or interviews. These sessions included an opportunity for those present to review the methods, findings, and recommendations included in the report. King County staff requested additional feedback and those attending, "noted that none of the findings and recommendations were surprising." The common themes across report back sessions are stated as follows in the report: "prevention and intervention efforts should be community-based rather than focus on individuals, connecting gun violence to mental health issues often shifts the focus on individuals rather than on communities, and communities want to hear about what actions will be taken to reduce and prevent gun violence."<sup>12</sup> Presentations were also made to representatives of law enforcement, civic groups, and staff from the Prosecuting Attorney's Office, Best Starts for Kids, Zero Youth Detention, and the Juvenile Justice Equity Steering Committee. However, the lead researcher was unable to present to the King County Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention Committee.

### **INVITED**

- Marguerite Ro, Chief of Assessment, Policy Development, and Evaluation/Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention, Public Health – Seattle & King County
- Vanessa Quince, Social Research Scientist, Assessment, Policy Development, and Evaluation, PHSKC

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Proposed Motion 2020-0005 (and its attachments)
2. Transmittal Letter
3. Youth Gun Violence PowerPoint dated 2-4-2020

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<sup>12</sup> Youth and Young Adult Gun Violence Report, Attachment A to Proposed Motion 2020-0005. P. 32

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