ST. LOUIS AREA VIOLENCE PREVENTION COMMISSION
STATEMENT ON POLICING & VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission is a regional, cross-sector initiative that works to reduce violent crime in the region by promoting and advocating for coordinated, well-resourced policies, support systems, and interventions among area governments, institutions and agencies that serve individuals and families most at risk of violent crime.

Problem Statement: There is a lack of trust between community members, especially people of color, and the police departments in the region. This is due to systemic issues in how the criminal justice system disproportionately affects black communities. Community members simultaneously feel over-policed and under-policed. This lack of trust leads to lower clearance rates for violent crimes due to lack of cooperation with investigations. This can lead to more retaliatory crime as victims take it upon themselves to find "justice" for their situation.

> **"We have a huge problem here in St. Louis and there needs to be major police reform to address this issue."**
>
> **-Response to the VPC Police Legitimacy Survey**

High-profile police killings including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor have again brought to the forefront discussions of the use of force in black communities. In the wake of the killing of Michael Brown, these discussions were also had with the creation of the Ferguson Commission Report with a slate of calls to action to create justice for all. In the State of Police Reform from September 2019, Forward Through Ferguson noted that meaningful changes, especially policy changes, had not made in many cases and "So, we close with the uncomfortable fact that progress is small, and can seem excruciatingly slow, and beset by failed and superficial attempts. But it's here. Change is happening, and that means we can learn from it, and try to do better moving forward."[1]

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted racial health disparities. This led to the St. Louis County Council pass a resolution asserting racism is a public health crisis.[2] Also, the Joint Boards of Health & Hospitals also declared that racism is a public health crisis.[3] Public health and public safety are closely linked with many of the same drivers creating racial disparities.

Background: One of the VPC's objectives is to activate communities to strengthen police legitimacy. Police legitimacy in this context is the degree to which residents believe the police are honest, try to do their jobs well, and are trying to protect the community against crime and violence. Questions about police legitimacy include:

- Do police give people a chance to explain and talk to them?
- Do police make choices on facts, not bias or prejudice?
- Do police treat people with respect?
- Do police care about your well-being, needs, and concerns?

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[1] https://forwardthroughferguson.org/stateofpolicereform/
[2] https://twitter.com/lisadclancy/status/1266120707391586316
[3] https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/st-louis-health-panel-says-racism-is-a-public-health-crisis/article_9b9dd3d0-5112-5abe-add7-40016281d17b.html

Updated 7/24/20

We recognize that our police legitimacy work, as well as the rest of our objectives, must be undertaken with a racial equity lens that acknowledges and calls out the systemic racism that is baked in to many of the systems we and our members represent and partner with.

In 2019, VPC held public community policing events and interviewed 15 law enforcement stakeholders to discuss what is and is not working in policing and what parts of community policing should be prioritized.

VPC also conducted an online police legitimacy survey with more than 1,200 responses.

Highest Rated. The 3 statements for which all groups had the highest agreement were:
a. I would call the police to report a crime.
b. I would call the police if I thought I saw someone acting suspicious
c. I would provide tips to the police to help find a criminal

These responses show that, although residents had concerns about police legitimacy, they were still willing to engage with police when a crime or suspicious activity occurs.

Lowest Rated. Measures of equity had some of the lowest average scores.
a. Police serve all people equitably.
b. Police enforce the laws the same way across all people.

Transparency was also among the lowest rated statements.
c. Police admit when they get something wrong.

Overall, the police stakeholder interviews, community policing events, and police legitimacy survey feedback can be grouped into 4 major themes for improving police-community relations. They are:
- **Human Resources- Recruitment, Retention, & Promotion**
- **Transparency- Information & Accountability**
- **Community Engagement Practices**
- **Alternatives to Police Contact**

In light of these findings, VPC has created a set of recommendations and endorsements for public health and safety investments that would address these themes and support violence prevention.

Recommendations:

1. **Infuse Public Input into the Police Department Collective Bargaining Agreement-** In the interest of transparency, we recommend including public input in the process and suggest that this process be run by a third party rather than the police departments. We believe this is the recommendation that has the greatest potential to be transformative for public safety in St. Louis.

Collective Bargaining Agreements cover:
- Human Resources
- Complaint procedure
- Civilian oversight
- Use of force incidents
- Discipline/termination procedures
- Training standards

CBA with Public Input Could Allow for:
- Public database of complaints against officers
- Public database of use of force incidents
- Public database of officers fired for misconduct or use of force
- Recruitment/Promotion/Retention decisions that include community engagement
- Strengthened civilian oversight
- Increased minimum training standards
- Increased accountability through early warning systems for mental health concerns

Accountable Bodies: St. Louis Board of Aldermen, St. Louis City Mayor, St. Louis City Department of Personnel, St. Louis County Council, St. Louis County Police Board, St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, St. Louis County Police Department

2. **Implement the Forward Through Ferguson Calls to Action-** Forward Through Ferguson is a valuable member of VPC. We endorse the calls to action from the Ferguson Commission Report with special focus on transparency and accountability, although many will require changes to the police department collective bargaining agreements in Recommendation 1.[4] These include:

   - Establish a Use of Force Database **(We further recommend that this data be compiled and made public.)**
   - Develop & Publicize a Comprehensive Demonstration Plan **(In light of recent events, we further recommend that this plan ban the use of teargas, rubber bullets, and facial recognition software.)**
   - Assign Attorney General as Special Prosecutor in Use of Force Cases
   - Assign Missouri Highway Patrol to Investigate Use of Force

   Accountable Bodies: Missouri Legislature**,** Missouri Department of Public Safety, St. Louis Board of Aldermen, St. Louis County Council**,** St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, St. Louis County Police Department, North County Police Cooperative, Municipal Police Departments

3. **Create a Parallel Process for Police Accountability-** Raheem.org has created an accountability tool that lets citizens report both *positive and negative* encounters with law enforcement. The data is held by a third party and can be used for policy and practice improvement. Further, Raheem will customize the app for the St. Louis region. This allows residents who do not feel safe filing an Internal Affairs report or a report to the Civilian Oversight Board to have their voice heard. This requires dedicated funding for customization of the tool.

   Accountable Bodies: St. Louis Board of Aldermen, St. Louis City Mayor, St. Louis City Department of Personnel, St. Louis County Council, St. Louis County Police Board

   > **"Start walking the talk. You live each day on the idea of holding the community accountable but the degree to which you hold yourselves (AND the groups that support and use your image/name/etc) is almost non-existent. I wish I could believe in the "not all cops are bad" but as long as each individual cop does NOT hold themselves AND their colleagues accountable there is NO WAY FORWARD."**
   >
   > **-Response to VPC Police Legitimacy Survey**

4. **Implement the CAPCR 2021 Budget Proposals & Reinvestment in Social Services and Public Health-** VPC supports CAPCR's call to divest from policing and invest in public health interventions to prevent violence[5] such as:

   - **Invest in Vacancy Abatement and Remediation**- Vacancy has consistently been linked to incidence of crime. VPC and our partners have collaborated on a study of St. Louis that specifically replicates these findings. Being in the vicinity of vacant buildings and lots correlates with drastically higher risk for homicide and aggravated assault. Vacant buildings and lots are attractors for illegal activity from dumping to drug sales to homicide. When VPC and our partners like the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership have canvassed in high crime neighborhoods, residents most often cite vacant buildings and lots as a safety concern before traditional street crime. Research has also shown that mowing and cleaning lots have a positive impact on neighbors' feelings of safety as well as reducing crime. The City of St. Louis struggles to consistently maintain vacant lots due to a small budget.

     > **"Defund the police and the jails. Fund networks of transformative justice practitioners. Fund health, food security, transportation, wrap-around support for youth and older adults."**
     >
     > **-Response to VPC Police Legitimacy Survey**

   - **Fund Subsidized Employment Training that Incorporates Wraparound Services and Mental Health Treatment-** Employment is another factor that is correlated with a reduction in violence, but not all programs are created the same. READI Chicago[6] is an evidence-based subsidized employment program

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[4] https://forwardthroughferguson.org/report/signature-priorities/justice-for-all/

[5] https://www.capcr-stl.org/r-e-a-l-p-u-b-l-i-c-s-a-f-e-t-y

[6] https://www.heartlandalliance.org/readi/

where the participants work for the City, get wraparound services for their family since many reasons people don't succeed in employment may be due to family issues (e.g. a child needs child care or a parent gets sick) as well as cognitive behavioral therapy to help the participant work through past trauma and develop healthy coping and work skills. We recommend this program be adapted for St. Louis

Accountable Bodies: St. Louis Board of Aldermen, St. Louis County Council

5. **Create a Civilian Public Safety Response Network for 911 Calls Unrelated to Crime-** Police are called on to respond to a variety of 911 calls that are not specifically crimes. Residents call 911 for mental health emergencies, drug overdoses, alcohol intoxication, homelessness, and nonviolent neighborhood disputes. Police are not necessarily the best equipped group to respond to these calls, potentially leading to violent encounters and burnout among officers who are required to respond to calls for which they are not trained/equipped. These calls require mental health service providers, crisis intervention specialists, and social workers to de-escalate situations and connect residents to existing resources. Other cities across the country are beginning to design a system where 911 callers have the option of accessing other services besides police, fire and ambulance.[7] A version of this response has been piloted in St. Louis City through an adaptation of Cops & Clinicians from New Haven.[8] We recommend that the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County develop a civilian public safety response network that allows 911 callers to access mental health workers, community health workers, and social workers to respond to calls that are not about crime.
Accountable Bodies: St. Louis Board of Aldermen, St. Louis County Council

6. **Invest in a Nonfatal Shooting Response System (Support Victims of Gun Violence and Child Deaths)-** Also in the DOJ's Diagnostic Analysis, they identified nonfatal shootings, where someone is injured but does not die, as a potential intervention point. VPC's crime data analysis shows that for every homicide, there are 20 aggravated assaults. This number holds true for St. Louis City and County. Specifically, the DOJ recommended "helping to link shooting victims and perpetrators to services and supports to prevent further involvement in gun violence." VPC adopted that recommendation as one of our objectives to improve the community-level response to nonfatal shootings. We have convened victim service agencies, mental health providers, United Way 211, and other service providers to create a common intake through 211, funded a position at Crime Victim Center to navigate victims through the service network, and to identify gaps in service. One need that is currently not met is the need for property repair after a shooting- boarding up windows, replacing locks, fixing doors. This need was previously met by Operation Safestreet, which received funding through the City of St. Louis, although it ended when funding was reallocated. **We recommend investing in service provision for victims of nonfatal shootings including allocating funding to helping victims to repair their homes after nonfatal shootings.**
Accountable Bodies: St. Louis Board of Aldermen, St. Louis County Council

7. **Invest in Safe Spaces for Youth and Young Adults & Youth Employment Programs-** The Youth Violence Prevention Partnership created a Safe & Thriving St. Louis Strategic Plan for 2018-2023 (available at stlareavpc.org/resources). In the process of creating this plan, they held a dozen youth cafes with more than 100 youth participating, including justice-involved youth. One of the youths' biggest safety concerns was the lack of safe spaces in their neighborhoods. They reported that what should be safe spaces like parks were often not safe for them or spaces that were safe were not welcoming to youth and young adults. Youth participants expressed feelings of

> **"I think they (police) need to focus on building relationships and trust in a community where there is virtually none. The fact that a child quickly goes from wanting to be a police officer when they grow up to being afraid of the police is a big problem, and I believe much of that lies on the severed relationship between the police and the community they serve."**
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> **-Response to VPC Police Legitimacy Survey**

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[7] https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/502856-albuquerque-will-use-social-workers-to-respond-to-certain-911-calls?fbclid=IwAR2SN2t8Wa0t9utNZNu4KatA70a5dWq4S0M2IY6A1Oh0z0FZ_3q9NJXoaAk
[8] https://www.ksdk.com/article/news/police-team-with-social-workers-in-st-louis-pilot-program/63-3943c8e2-636d-47bb-bb06-70bd5d43d0d5

being trapped in their home with nothing to do because they or their caregivers feared for their safety if they left the house. The DOJ Diagnostic Analysis identified transition-age youth (16-25) as one of the hardest hit by violence since well over half of suspects (58.4 percent) in gun violence in St. Louis City and over one-third of victims (36 percent) were young, ages 15-24 years old. For this group, having a safe place that is open late, or even 24 hours a day is important.

VPC convened mental health providers (in response to a request from the Governor to the Department of Mental Health) as well as youth service providers and recreation groups to discuss this as part of our objective to advance trauma-informed violence prevention practices in systems and community.. The group identified a gap in service for young adults age 20-24. Safe spaces for this group at drop-in centers should be made available during extended weeknight hours to at least midnight and on weekends, while most service providers are only available during normal business hours or until 7pm. Investments are needed to expand the hours of available services and to extend services to youth age 20-24 and their most unmet emergent needs including housing and mental health services.

One of the programs that research has shown to reduce violence committed by and against youth is employment- during the summer and year round.[9] Youth in areas of highly concentrated poverty which are often those most impacted by violence face structural barriers to employment including transportation issues, underperforming schools, lack of employer recruitment in their area, and lack of opportunities within their communities.[10] The Brookings Institution recommends youth employment programs that:

- Set specific program goals that go beyond the number of youth served and measure progress toward those goals. These should measure incremental progress and be readily trackable with program data.
- Invest in sharing and building knowledge about what works in summer jobs programs via performance management systems, better use of administrative data, learning communities, and evaluation.
- Align program staffing and capacity with goals for scale, learning, and quality.
- Deepen and extend services to both young people and employers, by providing more intensive services to participants when appropriate, linking participants to programs and services that extend beyond the summer, and maintaining stronger relationships with employers throughout the year to better understand their needs and thus make better job matches.
- Stabilize, diversify, and expand the funding base, including an increased federal funding commitment, by maximizing use of existing funding streams and sources, providing a more predictable funding cycle, and developing a large-scale competitive program for demonstrations and planning grants.[11]
- Recruit companies to offer additional opportunities to increase capacity for programs that currently have to turn away hundreds of youth annually.

Additional information on youth employment in St. Louis can be found through the Regional Youth Employment Coalition housed at VPC member Ready by 21 St. Louis.[12]

Accountable Bodies: St. Louis Board of Aldermen, St. Louis County Council, School Districts

8. **Develop & Publicize a Policy on Interactions with Transgender/Gender Non-Conforming People-** In our listening session and survey, transgender and gender non-conforming people had the lowest overall ratings of police legitimacy. Out of the 24 measures of police legitimacy (rated on a scale of 1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree), the most common answer for transgender respondents on 22 items was a 1-Strongly Disagree. These results echo national surveys like the U.S. Transgender Survey which show that 57% of transgender people reporting they are uncomfortable calling the police. When they did interact with police, 58% of transgender individuals reported mistreatment by police, 49% reported being repeatedly misgendered, and 6%

[9] https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/metro_2018jan_how-can-summer-jobs-reduce-crime-among-youth-final.pdf
[10] https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Brookings_Child-Trends_Pathways-for-High-Quality-Jobs-FINAL.pdf
[11] https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Summer-Jobs-Ross-7-12-16.pdf
[12] http://readyby21stl.org/current-work/

reported physical or sexual assault.[13] Because of these concerns, we recommend that local police departments develop and publicize a policy on interactions with transgender people. The policy should, among other items, prohibit the use of gender identity as a basis to question or search someone, prohibit harassment based on gender identity, edit reports to allow for additional gender identities besides male and female, allow people to provide a name currently used in addition to their legal name, and allow individuals to choose where they feel safest when they are being detained in gender-segregated areas. Model policies are available from the National Center for Transgender Equality[14], San Francisco Police Department[15], and the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police.[16] Importantly, we further recommend, whenever possible, that these policies be drafted in consult with organizations that are led by and serve transgender individuals in St. Louis.
Accountable Bodies: St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, St. Louis County Police Department, North County Police Cooperative, Municipal Police Departments

9. **Invest in Community Capacity Building-** An important goal of violence prevention efforts, including the work of VPC, is to increase capacity of communities to lead their own violence prevention efforts in the future. This has the added benefit of building capacity of residents in these communities to lead other neighborhood efforts like neighborhood revitalization, community building, and youth programs. The DOJ noted in their Diagnostic Analysis that 80% of nonfatal shootings and 70% of homicides happen in public spaces. This affects entire communities and creates trauma that pervades these neighborhoods. They recommended that the City and police "develop strategic interventions that reduce risk factors and improve protective factors for individuals, families and neighborhoods in high violence areas" Building community strength and cohesiveness is one of those protective factors. In the interest of this, VPC has engaged in of training, mobilization, community building, but our reach has been limited to two communities due to the agency and our Community Engagement Committee's capacity. We recommend investment in these capacity-building strategies be extended to all parts of the region that experience high rates of violence.
Accountable Bodies: St. Louis Board of Aldermen, St. Louis County Council

VPC stands ready to assist the accountable bodies in getting this important work done. We are a regional cross-sector collaborative of higher education, social service, government, and philanthropy. Since this is a timely issue with budgeting and police department CBAs being finalized in the near future, please contact us about opportunities to partner on the important work ahead.

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[13] https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Full-Report-Dec17.pdf
[14] https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/resources/FTPS_MP_v6.pdf
[15] https://www.sanfranciscopolice.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/DGO5.22%20Interacting%20with%20Transgender%2C%20Gender-Variant%2C%20and%20Nonbinary%20Individuals.pdf
[16] https://go.mpdconline.com/GO/GO_501_02.pdf