

It is a tremendous honor to be asked to give testimony to the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security, and to be able to offer a perspective from the field of education. For that opportunity, I would like to thank Chairman Sensenbrenner, Vice-Chair Gohmert, Ranking Member Scott, and the other members of the Subcommittee. I would also like to offer special thanks to Representative Quigley of the Illinois 5th District, who is no doubt familiar with some of the issues that I will be discussing today.

When we talk about violence in Chicago, the statistics that are regularly cited show a city in a profound state of crisis. With every weekend comes another round of bloodshed. Between June 22 and 24, four were killed, including two boys aged 13 and 14, and 30 were wounded.¹ Between June 29 and July 1, 17 were wounded, including a three-year-old, and nine were killed.² So far this year, more Americans have been killed in the streets of Chicago than in service in Afghanistan³; Chicago has seen four times as many murders since January as New York City.⁴ And last week, as the country awoke to the profoundly tragic news that a masked gunman had opened fire in a Colorado movie theater, I was learning that in Chicago, three teenagers had been shot, including an Urban Prep student.

Urban Prep Academies, the country's first network of all-boys charter high-schools and the organization that I represent today, was created in large part as a response to some of the factors that are currently playing out in the form of this summer's violence. In Chicago, as in large cities around the country, minorities, especially Black males, are grossly overrepresented in prison populations⁵ and underrepresented in schools⁶ and places of work.⁷ The statistics tell a story of endemic

¹ Crisesider Staff, "4 dead, 30 wounded in weekend Chicago violence intensifying search for answers," CBS News/AP [Chicago] 25 Jun. 2012, 22 Jul. 2012 <http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083_162-57459869-504083/4-dead-30-wounded-in-weekend-chicago-violence-intensifying-search-for-answers>.

² "Chicago Shootings: 3-Year-Old Boy Among At Least 17 Hurt, 9 Killed In Weekend Gun Violence," Huffington Post 7 Jun. 2012, 22 Jul. 2012 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/02/chicago-shootings-3-year-_n_1643270.html>.

³ Crisesider Staff, "4 dead, 30 wounded in weekend Chicago violence intensifying search for answers," CBS News/AP [Chicago] 25 Jun. 2012, 22 Jul. 2012 <http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083_162-57459869-504083/4-dead-30-wounded-in-weekend-chicago-violence-intensifying-search-for-answers>.

⁴ David Knowles, "Wild West in Chicago – City officials fight back as murder rate outstrips N.Y., L.A. – even Kabul," The Daily 15 Jun. 2012, 22 Jul. 2012. <<http://www.thedaily.com/page/2012/06/15/061512-news-chicago-murders-knowles-1-3>>.

⁵ "Statistics on African-American males," The Morehouse Male Initiative 22 Jul. 2012 <http://morehousemaleinitiative.com/?page_id=178>.

⁶ Sean F. Reardon, Rachel Baker and Daniel Klasik, "Race, income, and enrollment patterns in high selective colleges, 1982-2004." Center For Education Policy Analysis at Stanford University 15 Jul. 2012, 22 Jul. 2012

disenfranchisement. The national high school drop-out rate for Black males hovers around 50 percent,⁸ and the leading cause of death for African-American males age 15 to 34 is homicide.⁹ Today, one in three Black children live in poverty,¹⁰ and one-third of Black men born this decade will spend some time in prison.¹¹ In Chicago, just 2.5 percent of Black males attending public school will graduate from a four-year college.¹²

Urban Prep's mission is simple: To provide a high-quality comprehensive education that results in our graduates succeeding in college. While our schools are still young, thanks to the efforts of our dedicated teachers, administrators, parents and students, Urban Prep is well on its way to increasing the number of African-American males who earn college degrees. Since our first senior class graduated in 2010, 100 percent of Urban Prep graduates (all Black males) have been admitted to college, and 83 percent are persisting in college, compared to a national persistence rate for Black males of 35 percent.¹³ In 2010, the most recent year for which data is available, one in twenty African-American males enrolling in college from Chicago Public Schools was an Urban Prep graduate.¹⁴

It takes hard work to achieve these outcomes. Our students have a longer school day that results in an additional year of instruction when compared to traditional public schools, and are required to participate in at least one afterschool activity each semester. Many of our young men spend their summers in academic programs at universities like Cornell, Georgetown and Oxford. They are the heirs to a unique school

<<http://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/race%20income%20%26%20selective%20college%20enrollment%20uly16%202012.pdf>>.

⁷ United States, Department of Labor, The African-American Labor Force in the Recovery. (Washington: 2012) 22 Jul. 2012 <http://www.dol.gov/_sec/media/reports/BlackLaborForce/BlackLaborForce.pdf>.

⁸ "Yes We Can: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males 2010," Schott Foundation for Public Education. Aug. 2010, 22 Jul. 2012 <<http://schottfoundation.org/publications/schott-2010-black-male-report.pdf>>.

⁹ United States, Center for Disease Control, Leading Causes of Death by Age Group, Black Males-United States, 2007 (Washington: 2007) 22 Jul. 2012, <<http://www.cdc.gov/men/lcod/2007/BlackMales2007.pdf>>.

¹⁰ Kristin Anderson Moor, Zakiya Redd, Mary Burkhauser, Kassim Mbwana and Ashley Collins, "Children in Poverty: Trends, Consequences, and Policy Options," Apr. 2009, 22 Jul. 2012 <http://www.childtrends.org/files/child_trends-2009_04_07_rb_childreninpoverty.pdf>.

¹¹ "Criminal Justice Fact Sheet" NAACP 22 Jul. 2012 <<http://www.naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>>.

¹² Melissa Roderick, Jenny Nagaoka, and Elaine Allensworth, "From High School to the Future: A First Look at Chicago Public School Graduates' College Enrollment, College Preparation, and Graduation from Four-Year Colleges," The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research Apr. 2006, 22 Jul. 2012 <<http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/high-school-future-first-look-chicago-public-school-graduates-college-enrollment>>.

¹³ "MCLD College Scholar Program," Milwaukee Center for Leadership Development. 22 Jul. 2012 <<http://milwclcd.org/page3.php>>.

¹⁴ "2010 College Enrollment For the Class of 2010 Based on the National Student Clearinghouse Data For All Graduates," Chicago Public Schools 25 Apr. 2011: 1-11.

culture that celebrates even the smallest achievements in order to reinforce our belief that doing the right thing is the right thing to do.

Yet while Urban Prep students experience a safe-haven inside our schools, they still must often navigate treacherous streets in their communities. In order to shed more light on the state of affairs within one such community, rising Urban Prep sophomore Yaviel Ivey was recently asked to record a month-long video diary for CBS News.¹⁵ Toting a camcorder on his way to and from school as well as around his house, Mr. Ivey (in order to promote respect within our schools, we refer to our students by their surnames) chronicled the daily violence that is endemic to his neighborhood. "I don't expect to have a future [in my neighborhood]. I want better for myself," he said in one entry. In another entry, Mr. Ivey told about being asked by a gang member what gang he was affiliated with (there are as many as 600 Chicago gangs with approximately 150,000 members¹⁶), narrowly escaping when he responded that he was neutral. Mr. Ivey comes from a home in which he is loved and supported. He is a straight-A student who wants to become an entrepreneur. Yet even the advantages of family, intellect, and ambition cannot protect him from the violence that threatens his community. For Mr. Ivey, like so many other young people, simply walking out of the front door can be a dangerous undertaking.

And the danger is all too real. A year ago, Leonetta Sanders, the principal of Harper High School (located on Chicago's South Side just two miles from Urban Prep's Englewood Campus) started a list of current and former students who became victims of gun violence in a binder she kept in her office.¹⁷ This July, she added her 27th name, eight dead and 19 shot. Ms. Sanders says that at the end of the school year, her students will talk not about what they will do over the summer, but how many of them will survive to make it back next fall. Sadly, stories like this are typical of many Chicago public high schools.

And the bullets wound many more in addition to those they strike. Research by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry has found that almost one-half of all American inner-city youth show signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.¹⁸ The fear of personal danger and the knowledge that loved ones may be taken at any point

¹⁵ Byron Pitts, "Chicago teen on living amid violence: 'I don't expect to have a future here'," CBS Evening News 12 Jun. 2012, 22 Jul. 2012 <http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18563_162-57452004/chicago-teen-on-living-amid-violence-i-dont-expect-to-have-a-future-here>.

¹⁶ Mark Guarino, "In Chicago, heat and homicide stoke fear and frustration," Christian Science Monitor 18 Jul. 2012, 22 Jul. 2012 <<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2012/0718/In-Chicago-heat-and-homicide-stoke-fear-and-frustration>>.

¹⁷ Fresh Air, WBEZ, Chicago, IL 9 Jul. 2012

¹⁸ John Otrompke, "Nearly Half of Inner-City Youth Suffer From Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Presented at AACAP," P/S/L Group 4 Nov. 2010, 22 Jul. 2012 <<http://www.pslgroup.com/dg/25bdd6.htm>>.

weigh heavily on the fragile psyches of our youth. Additionally, the steps many families take to safeguard their sons and daughters, including prohibiting them from going outside on their own, have unintended consequences as young people miss out on opportunities for exercise and personal enrichment.

Urban Prep has always been a leading voice in demanding that greater attention be paid to addressing the problem of youth violence. And we have not been alone in seeking answers from our city, state, and federal governments. The leadership of other schools, as well as community groups, has fought for a stronger response to the violence sweeping our streets. We want to know what's being done to make our city safer. But before we have answers, we need to know that we're asking the right questions.

We need to ask what kinds of events lead to violent crime in Chicago, because most of it is not, as some would have you believe, the result of gang warfare or drug-related robberies. Chicago Police Department data show that the most common homicide in Chicago begins as a nonviolent altercation, escalates into violence and involves guns.¹⁹ Clearly, Chicagoans need to learn that retribution isn't the answer, but they also need to know that justice will be served. Let's support interactions between the community and police force so that Chicagoans feel like their neighborhoods are being protected, not occupied. And let's increase the penalties for illegal weapon possession so that arguments can't turn so quickly into gunplay.

We need to ask how we might prevent crime from happening rather than reacting to its effects. Last year's popular documentary *The Interrupters* brought some much-deserved attention to CeaseFire, a group that works to end cyclical violence in some of Chicago's toughest neighborhoods. Using staff members who have cachet within the community to identify and reach out to those who might be at risk for violence, CeaseFire has been able to cool a number of hotspots in the disadvantaged neighborhoods of Englewood, Auburn Gresham and West Garfield Park. Earlier this month, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel promised to provide funding for 90 additional CeaseFire staff members, and to instruct the Chicago Police Department to work more closely with CeaseFire identifying and reaching out to at-risk individuals.²⁰

We need to ask questions about the type of person most likely to become a victim or perpetrator, and then devise strategies to specifically impact these individuals. According to the University of Chicago Crime Lab, both victims and perpetrators of violent crimes are far likelier than not to be between the ages of 10 and 25, to be

¹⁹ "Youth program helps curb violence," [United Press International](http://www.upi.com/Health_News/2012/07/13/Youth-program-helps-curb-violence/UPI-87661342236140) 13 Jul. 2012, 22 Jul. 2012 <http://www.upi.com/Health_News/2012/07/13/Youth-program-helps-curb-violence/UPI-87661342236140>

²⁰ Carol Marin and Don Moseley, "Chicago Police, Ceasefire Prepare for Partnership," [NBC5 Chicago](http://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/chicago-police-ceasefire-tio-hardiman-161873765.html). 9 Jul. 2012, 22 Jul. 2012 <<http://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/chicago-police-ceasefire-tio-hardiman-161873765.html>>

minorities, and to be male. In predicting the likelihood of involvement in a violent crime, the Crime Lab lists several non-demographic variables as well, most notably alcohol use, mental health problems, and “perhaps particularly,” school failure.²¹ Let’s acknowledge that in Chicago, certain populations – young Black men particularly – are far more likely to be perpetrators and victims of violence. But instead of blaming these young people, let’s develop and support outreach programs targeting these specific groups, so that they know that there are alternatives to gangbanging, and that if they follow the difficult path through high school and to college, they will be supported every step of the way.

We need to ask what strategies already in place are having an effect on youth and gang violence, and how we can support them. A study released last week by the University of Chicago Crime Lab found that young men who participated in an athletics-based youth counseling program were 44 percent less likely to be arrested for violent crime while participating in the program.²² Investing in targeted programs like these is not only right; it is, in time of budgetary constraints, the fiscally responsible thing to do. The same University of Chicago study found that pro-social youth programming produces a return on investment of between three and thirty-one times over when compared to the societal cost of violence, incarceration and rehabilitation. Let’s provide further support so that programs like these can be replicated, and new programs tested.

We need to be able to empathize with those Chicagoans for whom violence and danger have become part of a devastating routine. These are individuals whose lives and choices are constrained by the constant threat of violence, who spend their time, like Leonetta Sanders, memorializing those that they have lost; or, like Yaviel Ivey, longing for a life outside the neighborhood; or like our students and others who have been shot or shot at, enduring the trauma and the long recovery of victimization. Put yourselves in their shoes. Imagine what it’s like for the child who has to pass by streets where he might be attacked simply because of where he lives; for the mother who has to worry about not when but if her child will come home tonight; for the school that can’t have outdoor recess or hold a homecoming football game for fear of a drive-by shooting. If we cannot stem the violence, we condemn these innocents and others like them to suffer for crimes of which they had no part.

We need to remember that this is not just a South Side problem, not just a Chicago problem, not just a problem for Illinois. The violence in one of America’s

²¹ “Report: Gun Violence Among School-Age Youth in Chicago,” [The University of Chicago Crime Lab](http://crimelab.uchicago.edu/page/report) 22 Jul. 2012 <<http://crimelab.uchicago.edu/page/report>.>

²² William Harms, “Study: Chicago counseling program reduces youth violence, improves school engagement,” [UChicagoNews](http://news.uchicago.edu/article/2012/07/13/study-chicago-counseling-program-reduces-youth-violence-improves-school-engagemen) 13 Jul. 2012, 22 Jul. 2012 <<http://news.uchicago.edu/article/2012/07/13/study-chicago-counseling-program-reduces-youth-violence-improves-school-engagemen>.>

greatest cities is an American problem. Harvard sociologist Bruce Western has pointed out that sixty percent of Black males who do not complete high school are either dead or have spent time in prison by the they're 34 years old.²³ 60 percent – well over half – are dead or have spent time in prison by the age of 34. This isn't just a sickness within our city but a national epidemic, and we need to address it by pursuing strategies that will keep students in school until they graduate.

We need to learn from other cities that productive partnerships between the public and private sectors can mitigate violence before it becomes a police matter. This past fall, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and philanthropist George Soros matched \$60 million from the City of New York to fund the Young Men's Initiative, which will target 315,000 Black and Latino men between the ages of 16 and 24, with an eye towards improving graduation and employment rates while reducing criminal recidivism.²⁴ The Young Men's Initiative recognizes that targeted programs are the best means to provide demographic-specific measures like job training and culturally relevant teaching. It also acknowledges that prevention is more cost-effective than response. In the past 30 years, the incarceration rate in the United States has quadrupled, to the point where the United States now has a higher percentage of its population and higher total number of individuals behind bars than any other country in the world.²⁵ This is not only a burden on state and federal budgets, but is extremely disruptive to communities in which a large percentage of the population has spent time in prison.

We need to focus on that portion of the population – young minority men – most likely to commit and be victimized by violent crime, and in order to create targeted interventions, we need to go through the institutions that are already designed to impact these individuals. Schools are and must be our best means of breaking the cycle of violence that consumes so many young lives. We must equip our schools with the expertise and funding to provide enrichment activities that will give young people a safe place to spend the dangerous hours between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m.²⁶ We have to see our schools not just as places where children go to learn, but as institutions that build communities and community-minded individuals. And we need to continue to support

²³ Beckett Pettit and Bruce Western, "Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course: Race and Class Inequality in U.S. Incarceration," American Sociological Review Apr. 2004: 151-169

²⁴ Karen Zraick, "Young Men's Initiative, Program for Young Minorities, Draws Praise, Questions," Huffington Post 4 Aug. 2011, 22 Jul. 2012 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/05/young-mens-initiative-bloomberg_n_919181.html>

²⁵ "Prison Population Around the Globe," The New York Times 22 Apr. 2008, 22 Jul. 2012 <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2008/04/22/us/20080423_PRISON_GRAPHIC.html#>

²⁶ "After-School Programs," Education Week 3 Aug. 2004, 22 Jul. 2012 <<http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/after-school-programs>>

parents in their right to choose for their children whichever school they think will best suit their children's needs, whether that be a neighborhood, charter or magnet school.

At Urban Prep, we've recognized the importance of connecting our students with mentors and tutors who can provide them with the extra academic and emotional support that they need. One of the ways that this is being accomplished is through the Urban Prep Fellows Program, which matches recent college graduates with cohorts of around 25 freshmen. These men and women volunteer their time to serve our students and are models for the sort of engagement that we need to cultivate in our disadvantaged communities, but even they are not above the threat of danger. This past year, one of our Fellows, Will Morris, was mugged at gunpoint while he walked with two students to the train station. As I drove to visit him in the hospital (he suffered a broken nose and several other injuries), I was prepared to accept the fact that he would probably be dropping out of the program and heading home. I certainly wouldn't have blamed him if he had. Mr. Morris, however, didn't want to go home. He wanted to stay and continue to help our students thrive. His dedication and bravery should serve as an example to others, as should the courage of the students who were attacked with him. They too were committed enough to return to school and continue the pursuit of their education.

Finally, we must offer hope to communities and people plagued by violence. The only way we'll staunch the violence is to persuade those committing violent acts that they have something to lose, that there are opportunities for enjoyment and advancement that don't come at the expense of those around them, that there are paths to respect that don't go through fear. But hope is not enough. We need further support for schools like Urban Prep and others that are committed to educating our cities' most vulnerable children. We need engaged community organizations, empathetic law enforcement, and government that invests heavily in the wellbeing of its citizenry. In the end, what we need is action—action that will ensure that all children, all Americans, are safe.

Resources for Further Engagement

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