

Statement of Amy Sananman

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Examining the Mayor's Plan to Address Violent Crime in Public Housing
Committee on Public Housing

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Good morning, Chairperson Torres, Chairperson Gibson and members of the Public Safety and Public Housing Committees. My name is Amy Sananman and I am the Executive Director of the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety ("MAP"), which is overseen by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice ("MOCJ"). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and thank you to Council, the District Attorney's office and the Mayor for your investment in MAP. I am joined today by my colleagues Jean Claude LeBec, MOCJ's Chief Operating Officer; Ilana Turko, our Associate Counsel; David Farber, General Counsel, and Michael Kelly, General Manager from NYCHA, and Deputy Inspector Elvio Capocci from the NYPD.

The Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice advises the Mayor on public safety strategy and, together with partners inside and outside of government, develops and implements policies aimed at reducing crime, reducing unnecessary arrests and incarceration, promoting fairness, and building strong and safe neighborhoods.

Every New Yorker should live in a neighborhood where he or she feels safe. This City has made extraordinary progress in driving down violent crime over the last two decades, and over the last year and a half we have begun to build a scalable model to promote safety in few neighborhoods where violence persists.

Through the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety, the de Blasio administration is working to comprehensively strengthen neighborhoods in and around 15 New York City Housing Authority developments that have experienced some of the highest crime rates in the City. The MAP strategy recognizes the key importance of good policing – which includes both increases in patrol when appropriate, but also changes in the way the police interact with the neighborhoods such as wellness visits and having a role in community centers – but equally the importance of programming and physical improvements. These included keeping the community centers open late, employing thousands of young people, and installing lights and other security infrastructure.

This approach is working. An analysis by Crime Lab New York (a group of criminologists, economists, and policy analysts working with the city) used a rigorous control method to compare the 15 MAP developments to a matched set of developments with almost identical crime patterns as the 15 MAP sites. When we marked the first full year of the initiative in July 2015, violent crime was reduced by 11.2% in the 15 MAP developments, compared to the preceding year. After the first six months Crime Lab found that the felony crime rate in these 15 developments was 5% lower than it would have been without MAP interventions. While citywide, violent crime did go down 6% during FY15, a recent study by the Manhattan Institute independently concluded that the effect of the MAP initiative is “promising”-- citing a “10% net treatment effect on total major crime.”^[2]

Over the last year and a half, we have learned a lot. We talked with over 500 NYCHA residents about what they think causes crime and how we can effectively inhibit it. We have also talked to the leading researchers in the country on crime prevention. Both said the same thing: distress is concentrated in a few neighborhoods, meaning that the places where we see the highest number of shootings also tend to be the neighborhoods that suffer from other challenges such as poor health outcomes, low graduation and low employment. To prevent crime, we need to focus comprehensively on strengthening neighborhoods and supporting the people who live in them. As we move into the next year, we are translating that research into a targeted set of strategies that focus on “People, Places and Networks” with the goal of refining a scalable, effective model for strengthening neighborhoods to reduce crime. We will continue to work with residents to identify priorities and test what works so we can replicate it.

Over the last year and with greater emphasis over the next, MAP is working to support people by reducing chronic disadvantage. Following widely accepted studies that show access to resources reduces crime levels, much of the work we have already done has focused on enrollment regarding public benefits. As one example, the NYC Human Resources Administration (“HRA”) used MAP funding to hold weekly “office hours” for appointments and walk-ins at all 15 MAP sites, resulting in nearly 300 residents meeting with benefit specialists.

Guided by research showing that the physical environment can inhibit or encourage crime, MAP has also worked to create vibrant public spaces in the 15 developments targeted by this initiative. For example, for the first time in 30 years, NYCHA community centers were open until at least 11pm, seven days a week during the last two summers. Through these extended hours at 105 community centers operated by both DYCD and NYCHA, an additional 23,300 people were served. According to a survey sample of participating youth, 41% of them had not used a community center prior to the commencement of extended hours. Additionally, during MAP’s first year, there has been a significant investment in security enhancements – lights, cameras, and locked doors – yielding immediate results as well as establishing new protocols for NYCHA developments. We anticipate continued positive results as more of the improvements are implemented. To date, under MAP the City completed construction of 52 closed circuit televisions, removed all 12,268 feet of non-construction sidewalk shedding. 1,840

^[2] <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/IB-AA-1115.pdf>

security cameras were installed, and 184 temporary exterior light towers were placed to improve the lighting in public spaces. In the coming year, we will expand and refine these strategies, working with residents and experts to set priorities and track improvements.

During MAP's first year, there was also a significant focus on laying the groundwork for long-term participatory community engagement aimed at strengthening neighborhood cohesion. To further encourage neighborhood cohesion and build connection between neighborhoods and the City, in early 2016, we will launch MAP's NeighborhoodStat, which will bring residents and agencies together in the same room to collectively identify and articulate key public safety issues of concern and work hand and in hand in developing solutions based on their combined expertise. Regular participatory-style meetings with the NYCHA residents, law enforcement, and other agencies will occur at all 15 MAP sites in the coming months. This engagement initiative will include reviewing data and tracking outcomes to ensure that the City and its residents are able to evaluate progress in real time and deliver results.

The administration remains committed to promoting safety in NYCHA and we will continue to refine our comprehensive People, Places, and Networks strategy to reducing crime through strengthened neighborhoods over the coming year.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. I would be happy to answer any questions.