

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL



**ATTORNEY GENERAL  
BRIAN L. SCHWALB**

February 26, 2024

Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Suite 506  
Washington, DC 20004

Re: Proposed Safe Neighborhoods Amendment Act of 2024

Dear Councilmember McDuffie:

I am writing in regard to the proposed legislation you recently introduced, entitled the “Safe Neighborhoods Amendment Act of 2024,” which among other things, would combine into one new, independent agency the Office of Attorney General’s Cure the Streets (CTS) program and the violence interruption initiatives currently housed within the Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE).

I know you share my belief that violence interruption (VI) programs play an important role in addressing the unacceptable level of gun violence currently plaguing the District. VI programs complement the essential work being done by law enforcement, including MPD and the prosecutors in both my office and the U.S. Attorney’s Office. They do so by intervening with those most likely to commit or become victims of gun crimes, brokering mediated truces, and connecting people to desperately needed services and supports.

Since its launch in 2018, CTS has expanded its operations to ten neighborhoods, across five wards, that historically have had the highest levels of gun violence. The data-driven, public health approach that CTS employs has materially contributed to reduced violence in these targeted areas, saving lives and fostering safer communities. By way of example, despite citywide gun homicides increasing 34% last year, gun homicides in CTS areas decreased by 2%, and shootings in CTS areas decreased by 12%. On both gun homicides and assaults with a deadly weapon (ADWs), the CTS sites have proven more effective than the ONSE sites, although the ONSE sites experienced less gun violence than other parts of the District where there are no VI programs. As a result, there is widespread consensus that VI programs should continue to be a part of the District’s overall gun violence strategy.

I am proud of the hard, impactful work that CTS’s violence interrupters, outreach workers and program managers have been doing. However, I also appreciate the concerns about potential operational and intelligence inefficiencies that arise from having CTS and ONSE’s violence interruption programs organized under two different agencies. When it comes to operating, funding, and enhancing the effectiveness of VI work in the District, we can and should do better. Both the June 2022 DC Auditor Report and the February 2024 National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform report point out that merging the two programs could significantly improve the efficacy of our city’s violence interruption efforts.

I am—and have been—receptive to exploring the possibility of merging CTS and ONSE into a single VI program. My support for combining these programs hinges on several key considerations, which I believe will best position the District’s VI infrastructure to continue contributing to a reduction in gun violence:

**Shared Vision and Leadership:** The success of any program merger will require a clearly defined vision for the work moving forward and the appointment of qualified leadership with the autonomy and resources needed to succeed. A merged program, in addition to harnessing economies of scale, must ensure efficient, real-time information sharing that leverages technology and that is able to adapt to often quickly changing dynamics.

**Building Upon CTS’s Success:** I am committed to safeguarding CTS’s evidenced-based model to prevent jeopardizing the progress it has made. CTS has professionalized VI by implementing systems to issue grants, oversee grantees, collect data, and provide professional development resources to its grantees’ employees. These systems are essential to ensuring the program’s longevity. Any new agency must maintain and build upon these protocols.

**Accountability and Financial Commitment:** Successful VI programs in other cities have had strong, consistent executive leadership and adequate financial support committed to long-term effectiveness and sustainability. VI programs work best when they are seamlessly integrated with support services that address the root causes of violence – services that, in the District, are housed in or supported by executive agencies. These services include job readiness training, healthcare screening and access to treatment, housing and relocation assistance, and vital records support. To maximize effectiveness, any merged program will ensure that VI staff can immediately—without delay—connect people with needed services.

**Continuity of Staff:** Through grants, CTS employs more than 100 violence interrupters, many of whom are returning citizens. These trusted messengers have worked to build deep connections in the neighborhoods they serve, act as role models to program participants, and earn a living wage that provides stability and a second chance. Sustaining the relationships that CTS’s VIs have cultivated will be essential to preserving effective, community-oriented VI programs during and after any merger.

I commend you for your public statements recognizing, in general, the importance of a comprehensive approach to improving public safety and, more specifically, the importance of violence interruption and prevention initiatives. It is my hope that, through open and collaborative discussions, we can identify a merger plan that strengthens our city’s VI efforts, leverages the best aspects of CTS and ONSE, all in furtherance of reducing gun violence and saving lives. My team and I stand ready to meet with you and the other members of the Council to discuss the necessary aspects of a successful merger of these two vital programs.

Sincerely,



Brian L. Schwalb  
Attorney General for the District of Columbia