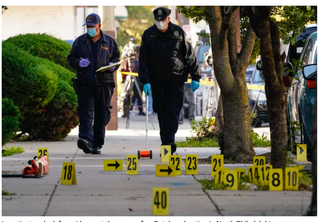
ADVERTISEMENT

OPINION

A new hope in the fight to reduce gun violence | Editorial

In partnership with the city, the Civic Coalition to Save Lives unites business, philanthropic, and faith-based communities in an effort to curb the bloodshed on Philadelphia's streets.

ADVERTISEMENT



Investigators look for evidence at the scene of an October shooting in North Philadelphia.
Matt Rourke / AP

by The Editorial Board
Updated Nov 24, 2022

Another day, another victim of gun violence in Philadelphia.

As of Tuesday, there have been 465 homicides in our city. All but 30 have been fatal shootings. The tally of the nonfatal kind, the kind that can leave physical and emotional scars that last a lifetime, stands at 1,688.

That includes four Overbrook High School students who were shot Wednesday morning after the West Philadelphia school let out early for Thanksgiving.

If we stay under last year's record of 506 shooting deaths, it may be a victory of luck — an inch to the left, an inch to the right — or of the talented professionals at our overworked trauma centers. Either way, Philadelphians will be left holding their breath, wondering what next year will bring.

ADVERTISEMENT

The Civic Coalition to Save Lives wants to end this morass and stop the bloodshed. The group's proposal of action by civic, business, philanthropic, and faith-based communities — in coordination with the city — is the kind of all-in effort this crisis demands. It's about time.

The coalition, led by the Philadelphia Foundation and the William Penn Foundation, has examined what's working in other cities and how it can be applied here. What's effective and, so far, missing in Philadelphia is a declared, citywide shared ownership of the problem, a focus on evidence-based strategies, and a single person or entity authorized to make difficult decisions to deploy and coordinate intervention resources.

» READ MORE: A mass shooting must never be business as usual | Editorial

Working off this template, Oakland, Calif., was able to reduce homicides by 46% between 2012 and 2018. Gun deaths in Indianapolis this year were down more than 17% from 2021. And in nearby Chester, gun-related homicides were down 60% since the 2020 launch of the Partnership for Safe Neighborhoods.

ADVERTISEMENT

A broad-based community approach is needed to curb gun violence. The government clearly can't do it alone.

More than $200 million has been earmarked this fiscal year for Philadelphia anti-violence initiatives. However, most of that money is going to the type of long-term investment the city needs but which has little immediate effect. These include jobs programs, blight removal, and grants to grassroots organizations.

government clearly can't do it alone.

More than $200 million has been earmarked this fiscal year for Philadelphia anti-violence initiatives. However, most of that money is going to the type of long-term investment the city needs but which has little immediate effect. These include jobs programs, blight removal, and grants to grassroots organizations.

Supporting and implementing an effective strategy to reduce gun violence in the short term is critical. Every day that passes puts lives at risk.

Measures such as the Community Crisis Intervention Program — which identifies people at risk of shooting someone or being shot and focuses on breaking the cycle of violence — have been proven to work. But the city has so far underfunded these short-term intervention programs and left them adrift.

ADVERTISEMENT

» READ MORE: As shootings continue unabated, they exact an emotional and economic toll | Editorial

A recent audit found that the CCIP, which is overseen by the Office of Violence Prevention, was in disarray and fell short of achieving its basic goals.

The civic coalition has an ambitious three-part proposal: to establish a Gun Violence Intervention Coordination Center to ensure the city has the technology and operational expertise needed to tackle the problem; form a Community Safety Civic Resource Board to share information on strategy and the role civic and governmental agencies play; and implement a community safety education campaign to better share the facts around gun violence prevention.

Coalition officials said they are working with Mayor Jim Kenney, who has accepted their offer of partnership. But vital to a sustained effort is the need for continuity beyond a single administration. As the coalition works with the city, they must develop the kind of model that can protect proven solutions from political meddling.

Reducing gun violence is possible. It has happened elsewhere, and it can happen here. It is also vital. Not only for the lives that will be saved but for the future of our city. Philadelphia cannot grow and thrive if its people live in fear.

Published Nov. 24, 2022

The Inquirer Editorial Board
This opinion was written by a group of journalists who work separately from the newsroom to debate matters of public interest.

© 2022 The Philadelphia Inquirer, LLC
Terms of Use / Privacy Policy / Cancellation Policy / California Notice / California residents do not sell my data request