



February 11, 2022

VIA E-MAIL & CERTIFIED RETURN RECEIPT US MAIL

Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney
900 E. Broad Street
Suite 201
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Mayor Stoney:

Greetings! We trust you are well.

We are writing to -

- Briefly address your recent announcements regarding plans to combat the scourge of gun violence in our city;
- Share with you that we will be coming to meet with you on Friday, February 25th, at 11 am at City Hall; and
- Ensure you have our April 5, 2022 Nehemiah Action on your calendar, at which 2,000+ of your constituents will be expecting your presence.

Re: Gun Violence in Our City

On September 30, 2020, you shared with us that you would be putting together a gun violence prevention framework in response to the repeated requests we had made of you to move forward with a proven, evidence-based gun violence intervention program called Group Violence Intervention, or GVI. Last week (a year and four months later), you and Chief Smith shared some updates regarding your framework.

We look forward to sitting down with you and trying to understand your plan further (see below). However, we do have major concerns. These concerns can best be explained by a section of the Council on Criminal Justice Violent Crime Working Group's third bulletin, entitled "Understanding Violent Crime." This section reads –

Many decisionmakers inside and outside government fail to properly understand the problem of community gun violence. Again and again, local leaders incorrectly assess the nature of the challenge they face. Some focus on the wrong things, such as emphasizing juvenile crime when the majority of gun violence involves adults. Others

fail to focus at all, only considering root causes or structural factors. Finally, many believe their local violence problem to be unique, when, in fact, community gun violence behaves similarly across jurisdictions. These repeated misunderstandings represent perhaps the single biggest impediment to reducing community gun violence in cities around the country.

We are concerned that Richmond is doing all three of these common missteps. It is our steadfast belief that if we want to truly bring an end to the suffering of thousands of our members across this city, we can and must implement GVI. This does not preclude you from moving forward with the plans you've outlined, many of which we believe will indeed bring positive gains to the city. But GVI will have a much more immediate impact on the violence that is claiming the lives of far too many of your constituents.

Re: Friday, February 25th at 11 am

Mayor Stoney, we have made eleven requests to meet with you since your re-election in the Fall of 2020. Eleven times we have been denied a meeting. Given that lives across this city are at stake, we can no longer accept this denial. **We will come to meet with you, at your office, on Friday, February 25th, at 11 am – along with representatives of several other community groups.** It is our fervent hope that we can sit down with you at the negotiating table and, out of mutual respect and deep concern for the people of this city, determine a path forward to truly address this gun violence crisis.

If you have another date / time that is better for you, please let us know by Tuesday, February 15. Otherwise, we will plan to see you on February 25.

Re: our Nehemiah Action on April 5th 7 pm

On Tuesday, April 5th, at 7 pm, an historical event will take place in our city. 2,000+ people will gather to seek commitments from our public officials advancing justice, in the areas of Gun Violence, Affordable Housing, and our newest campaign – Healthy Homes. The majority of our members will be present in person, at a large venue to be shared very soon.

The faith community represented by RISC sorely missed your presence last year, Mayor Stoney. Your attendance this year will be a testament to your belief in democracy, and justice for all in this city. We will expect to see you there on April 5th, and look forward to discussing this further with you on February 25th.

Finally, we wish to leave you with some words of our forebear in justice, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, Dr. King wrote –

You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension."

I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood. The purpose of our direct action program is to create a situation so crisis packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation.

We look forward to negotiating with you.

Sincerely, and on behalf of the members of our 22 RISC member congregations,



Pastor Don Coleman
East End Fellowship
RISC Co-President



Rev. Caitlin Deyerle
Southminster Presbyterian Church
RISC Co-President

CC:

Chris Suarez, Richmond Times-Dispatch
Ali Rockett, Richmond Times-Dispatch
Michael Paul Williams, Richmond Times-Dispatch
George Copeland, Richmond Free Press
Robert Hughes, CBS 6
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Shane Moreland, ABC 8
Ben Dennis, ABC 8
Todd Densmore, NBC 12
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Elliot Robinson, Virginia Public Media
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Ned Oliver, Virginia Mercury
Iman Mekonen, Commonwealth Times
Ross Catrow, Good Morning RVA

Gerald Smith, Richmond City Police Chief

Members of Richmond City Council