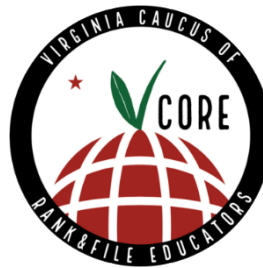




**RICHMONDERS
INVOLVED TO
STRENGTHEN OUR
COMMUNITIES**



VIA E-MAIL & US MAIL

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

Dear Mayor Levar Stoney,

The Richmond Times Dispatch editorial on June 7, titled, “To Stop Gun Violence, Mute the Politicians”, stated that politicians have failed us in preventing the recent epidemic of gun violence in Richmond and across the nation. The editorial enumerated the violence: On average, there have been 1.2 mass shootings a day in this country.¹ And when you consider that 250 of our neighbors were shot last year and more than 30 have been killed so far this year, it seems that every week, a fellow Richmonder is shot dead in the streets.²

While we do not agree that politicians should be muted, we do agree with the Editorial Board’s call for a meeting where the communities most impacted by gun violence sit at the head of the table and drive the conversation looking for solutions.

The Richmond Chapter of Virginia Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (VCORE) is a group of RPS education workers who are also Richmond Education Association members. These members have been on the frontlines of gun violence and have done the hard work of protecting and comforting our city’s youth in the midst of this crisis, all while preparing them for their bright futures.

Richmonders Involved to Strengthen Our Communities (RISC) is an interfaith group of two dozen congregations in the Richmond area that represent thousands of residents that have been affected by gun violence, and many of our clergy have presided over the funerals of gun violence victims.

Overall, we are a group of residents that have been directly and indirectly impacted by gun violence and we are asking for a meeting with you, Mayor Stoney, to discuss how we can prevent a tragedy like this from happening again. Imagine a city where all streets, buildings, schools, stores, parks, and places of worship are safe. A city where those who seek to carry out violence are embraced by their neighbors, shown compassion, and lay down their arms. A city where students can look forward to their graduation being a safe place to celebrate one of life’s

¹ 6 June 2023. Gun Violence Archive. <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>.

² 6 June 2023. RVA Major Crimes Unit. <https://www.rva.gov/police/major-crimes-unit>.

most joyous occasions. Only when communities are happy, healthy, and stable – when needs are met – will we really all be safe.

Your current efforts to address gun violence in the city have some good intention and we would like to assist you in your efforts. Youth programming is a good long-term solution. The violence interrupter program has yet to get up and running and has not been the most effective in other cities.³⁴ We must also remember that gun violence is but one symptom of a community in crisis. To holistically change our city we must ensure all residents of our community have quality housing, quality schools that are fully and accurately funded, and that all basic needs are met. Group Violence Intervention (GVI) is an entry point to this sort of holistic change because it meets people where they are and addresses their needs. Without doing so, we can and should expect more of the same violence and trauma. And the results speak for themselves -- though homicides did decrease last year, shootings increased by 5%.⁵ If we want this to change, we must try something different.

We, as members of RISC and VCORE, know that this safer and more just city can be made a reality if we set our differences aside and work towards a common goal of putting an end to senseless gun violence. Cities across the country and in Virginia have implemented community-based violence intervention programs such as GVI.⁶ This is a program catered to the needs of each city, that finds the small percentage of people that are responsible for the majority of the gun violence and intervenes before a shooting occurs by providing them with the support and resources they need to lay down their guns. By finding this small group and providing them with everything from housing and job opportunities to mental health care and mentors, the community leaders, law enforcement, and social services of these cities have worked together to cut gun violence in half and have proven that something can be done when you address the root causes of violence.⁷ While it is true that aspects of this program may be in place in Richmond, for GVI to work, it must be done comprehensively, in one framework, and with the support of local leaders and experts that have done amazing work in similar cities. Additionally, there is state and federal funding available for Richmond to implement GVI free of charge so there is no reason that we as a community cannot take similar steps and make this comprehensive framework just one more tool in our city's toolkit.⁸

³ Blair, Tannock. 9 December 2022. "What happened to the violence interrupters in Richmond?" *WRIC*. <https://www.wric.com/news/local-news/richmond/what-happened-to-the-violence-interrupters-in-richmond/>.

⁴ Zaru, Deena. 24 January 2022. "Another violence interrupter killed in Baltimore as community reels from gun violence." *95.5 WSB*. <https://www.wsbradio.com/news/national/another-violence/BOXDBWUOAT6YCSMBLJJGUFMZ4E/>.

⁵ Blair, Tannock. 26 January 2023. "Richmond police chief shares 2022 crime statistics in year-end briefing." *WRIC*. <https://www.wric.com/news/local-news/richmond/richmond-police-chief-shares-2022-crime-statistics-in-year-end-briefing/>.

⁶ Atkinson, Bill. 6 January 2023. "Hopewell starts process to bring 'Group Violence Intervention' to town as soon as June." *The Progress Index*. <https://www.progress-index.com/story/news/2023/01/06/hopewell-opts-to-start-group-violence-intervention-program-in-town/69784161007/>.

⁷ Group Violence Intervention. <https://nnscommunities.org/strategies/group-violence-intervention/>.

⁸ 10 October 2022. Copeland Jr., George. "Intervention group secures funding to address gun violence." *Richmond Free Press*. <https://richmondfreepress.com/news/2022/oct/27/intervention-group-secures-funding-address-gun-vio/>.

Please let us know by Friday, July 21st if you are you available one of the following dates/times to meet with members of RISC and VCORE to discuss gun violence and GVI:

Monday, August 7th at 10am or 12pm

Thursday, August 10th at 10am or 12pm

Friday, August 11th at 10am or 12pm

If you are not available at the listed dates and times, please suggest other dates and times when you are available to meet.

We hope that you welcome your community, especially those that have been affected by gun violence, with open arms. Mayor Stoney, our congregations and education workers have done some amazing work to help prevent and heal from the gun violence in our city, but we could do so much more if we join hands and work towards making this the just and safe city that God intended it to be. Our lives and the lives of our loved ones depend on it.

In Grace and Peace, and on behalf of the members of RISC's member congregations and the members of the Richmond Chapter of VCORE



Pastor Don Coleman
East End Fellowship
RISC Co-President



Rev. Amy Starr Redwine
First Presbyterian Church
RISC Co-President



Anne Forrester
VCORE Member
Richmond Chapter



Lisa Delao
VCORE Member
Richmond Chapter

CC:

Em Holter, Richmond Times-Dispatch
Michael Paul Williams, Richmond Times-Dispatch
Scott Bass, Richmond Times-Dispatch
David Ng, Richmond Times-Dispatch
Chris Coates, Richmond Times-Dispatch
Jeremy Lazarus, Richmond Free Press
George Copeland, Richmond Free Press
Karina Elwood, The Washington Post
Robert Hughes, CBS 6
Elizabeth Moss, CBS 6
Tyler Lane, CBS 6
Jon Burkett, CBS 6
Elizabeth Holmes, CBS 6
Rolynn Wilson, ABC 8
Shane Moreland, ABC 8
Dean Mirshahi, ABC 8
Nicole Dantzler, ABC 8
Todd Densmore, NBC 12
Henry Graff, NBC 12
Jahd Khalil, Virginia Public Media
Patrick Larsen, Virginia Public Media
Ned Oliver, Axios Richmond
Gabriela de Camargo Goncalves
Ross Catrow, Good Morning RVA
Jon Baliles, RVA 5x5
Kat McNeal, The Virginia Defender

Members of Richmond City Council