



Legislation Text

File #: RES 20-1601, **Version:** 1

Advancing the City's Continued Efforts to Implement a Community-First Approach to Public Safety.

Whereas, a Community-First Public Safety framework seeks to build a compelling, holistic, and proactive violence reduction and community-centered safety strategy for Saint Paul which is informed by deep public engagement, research, tracking and analysis of real-time data, and cross-sector collaboration of stakeholders; and

Whereas, research and history shows that true community safety is an outcome of investing deeply and directly in communities in stable housing, education, youth programs, job opportunities, and environmental and public health; and

Whereas, Chief Todd Axtell and our Saint Paul Police Department continue to build and maintain relationships across our community through partnerships, mentoring programs, and youth engagement, and through policy reform including revision of the Department's use-of-force and K9 Unit policies; and

Whereas, our police officers are called upon to respond to a broad array of needs beyond emergencies and crime, and following an increase of 48,000 more non-emergency low-priority 911 calls between 2016 and 2019, creating alternate response models that ensure our officers remain available for emergency and crime response is vital; and

Whereas, research and history also shows that funding caring, committed community organizations and networks to support and engage our youth and create positive community presence in our neighborhoods is one of the most effective ways to strengthen community relationships, foster lasting stability, intervene safely in a range of crises, and reduce and prevent violent crime; and

Whereas, research and history also shows that investing in punitive, reactive, traditional policing models while neglecting needed proactive investments have yielded greatly harmful disparities in racial equity for Black, indigenous, immigrant, and other communities of color (BIPOC); and

Whereas, the unjust and heartbreaking murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Philando Castile, and far too many others at the hands of police have reopened deeply painful wounds that span back decades, and led to a movement of national uprisings this summer and beyond that seek justice for Black lives and demand our recommitment to this work; and

Whereas, in order to continue moving forward on community-first public safety as a community, the City should prioritize engagement that facilitates truth-telling, reconciliation, and healing from the harms and inequities many families and communities impacted by police and state violence still experience; and

Whereas, the City of Saint Paul has already taken significant steps over the past decade toward building a foundation for Community-First Public Safety most recently through a \$1.4M earmarked investment in the 2020 Budget; and

Whereas, in 2019 the Saint Paul City Council convened a one-year Community-First Public Safety Workgroup to consider actions and pathways toward accelerating a community-first public safety model and prioritizing violence prevention; and

Whereas, further progress will require an approach that intentionally centers the communities and families most historically and presently impacted by police and state violence, gives impacted residents clear decision-making opportunities and inputs in policy-making as a part of engagement, and sets clear goals for the City of Saint Paul which will explore some of the city's current approaches to public safety with a fair, fact-based evaluation process; and

Whereas, a strong, deeply rooted and broad foundation of community organizations, networks, everyday leaders, organizers and healers creating community-first public safety in neighborhoods already exists in St. Paul, and future city efforts to advance community-first public safety should solicit and build on their longstanding knowledge and expertise; and

Whereas, further progress will also require developing initiatives like community grants that break cycles of violence through providing healing and trauma response to victims, which would be administered by trusted community partners from BIPOC communities most experiencing violence; and

Whereas, further progress will additionally require consideration of the city's current and significant investments in initiatives outside of traditional law enforcement (e.g. COAST Team in the Police department, Community Health Care Worker program in Fire department, Healing Streets initiative in Public Health department, AWAKENINGS in Parks department, Community Ambassadors program) to determine impact and to make adjustments and investments as needed; and

Now, Therefore, Be it Resolved, that the St. Paul City Council, in partnership with the Mayor Melvin Carter, calls for the creation of a community-first public safety commission that will center community voices and those most impacted in analyzing the challenges stated above and setting a vision for public safety moving forward;

And Be It Further Resolved that this commission:

Consider the creation of an Office of Violence Prevention and/or Office of Community-First Public Safety to support community-first public safety work in ongoing partnership with stakeholders and the community. At a minimum, explore what level of staff capacity would be required to drive and integrate this work across departments and what would be the charge and structure of an ongoing violence prevention advisory committee, including the exploration of aforementioned actions to facilitate further progress. And,

Consider an alternative approach to our 911 dispatching. Some calls for service (e.g. Priority 4 and Priority 5) are potentially less dangerous and more time consuming for sworn officers. At a minimum, explore if any of these calls for service can be more appropriately handled outside of traditional law enforcement.

And Be It Further Resolved, that the Council requests that Mayor or his designee make quarterly reports to the Council on the ongoing work related to community first public safety, unless the Council withdraws such request; and

Be It Finally Resolved, this community-first public safety commission will make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council by May 3, 2021.

