



HENNEPIN COUNTY

# Safe Communities

SUMMIT 2024



*Empowering communities to thrive*

May 16 and 17, 2024





## Welcome to the Safe Communities Summit

### Hennepin County Safe Communities

Safe Communities, Hennepin County's community violence prevention department, was created in response to community unrest and violence after the murder of George Floyd, amid the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Hennepin County Board of Commissioners committed \$12.5 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for efforts to prevent, reduce and mitigate gun violence in communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

Thanks to these investments from the board, Safe Communities is taking a long-term, layered, person-centered approach to break the cycle of violence and make every neighborhood safer. This work is only possible through strong partnerships with community to increase safety, support victims and survivors, and improve relationships.

In addition to Community Violence Prevention programming, Safe Communities includes the Joint Community Police Partnership, No Wrong Door, Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner programming and the Youth Connection Center.



Learn more about Hennepin County Safe Communities, our partners, and our programming. [hennepin.us/safe-communities](https://hennepin.us/safe-communities)

### Cities United

Founded in 2011 by leading political and philanthropic voices, Cities United was launched in the spirit of action to curtail the epidemic of homicides and shootings among Black men and boys age 14-24 in our country. From our inception, Cities United has centered those most impacted by violence in our work, building relationships and supporting more than 150 communities to prioritize safety, encourage holistic health, and inspire hopefulness. This is done through organizing resources, addressing the needs of those at risk of violence today, being asset-framed in the narratives about their communities, and coaching and supporting the staff and community members that actualize a collective vision for safety.

Today, Cities United takes a systems-wide approach to public safety. Our nationwide network includes mayors, community-based organizations, young leaders, and everyone in between who pushes our work forward. Every relationship is both deeply personal and highly strategic. Through our work, we ultimately leverage those relationships to help local leaders and their communities build comprehensive public safety plans.

Together, we're working to interrupt violence, dismantle systems of inequity, and make investments directly into communities directly impacted by community violence to save lives. To help communities achieve their goals, we used our years of experience to develop two frameworks: Reimagining Public Safety, which highlights 15 specific, evidence-based solutions that cities can adopt, and the Roadmap to Safe, Healthy, and Hopeful Communities, which helps each city create a customized and sustainable comprehensive public safety plan.

Cities United is honored to partner with Hennepin County and support the Safe Communities Summit. To deepen your learning, we invite you to connect with us virtually at [CitiesUnited.org](https://CitiesUnited.org) and to join us this October in Seattle for our Annual Convening.

Together, we will achieve our vision to ensure that all communities in this region are safe, healthy, and hopeful.

In Partnership,  
Anthony Smith, Executive Director



Join the virtual conversation!

Post your pics and thoughts and tag us on social media. [#hcsummit24](https://twitter.com/hcsummit24)

# Day 1

9 a.m.

Registration opens

10 a.m.

Opening

Welcome

DeVon Nolen, emcee

Land Acknowledgment

Dr. Tamara Mattison

Welcome address

Irene Fernando, Hennepin County District 3 Commissioner, Chair

Jeffrey Lunde, Hennepin County District 1 Commissioner

10:45 a.m.

Local Artist Showcase

Spoken Word by Muna Abdulahi

11 a.m.

Opening Plenary: Elevating youth voices: Building safer communities together

**Facilitators**

Rachel Askew, Cities United

De'Jiohn Brooks, World Youth Connect

**Youth panelists**

Jariah Weglarz, A Mother's Love Initiative

Candace Lewis, New Hope Multicultural Advisory Council, Joint Community Police Partnership

Drew Richardson, A Mother's Love Initiative

Janie Ye, Asian Media Access

Ayub Hussein, Fortune Relief and Youth Empowerment Organization

Kobe Gourneau, Minneapolis American Indian Center

Noon

Local Artist Showcase

Musical performance by Known MPLS

12:15 p.m.

Break

12:30 p.m.

Safe Communities Plenary and lunch

**Moderator**

Lisa Bayley, Hennepin County Safe Communities Director

**Hennepin County panelists**

Antonio Smith, Violence Prevention Coordinator

Ifrah Jama, Violence Prevention Coordinator

Nathan Howard, Supervisor, Joint Community Police Partnership

Don Ryan, Program Manager

Linnea Lindeman, No Wrong Door Coordinator

Dr. Tamara Mattison, Senior Administrative Manager

1:30 p.m.

Transition to breakout sessions

1:45 p.m.

**Breakout One - Room: Minnesota 1**

Creating protective environments: Preventing trauma before it happens

**Moderator**

Dr. Tamara Mattison

**Panelists**

Jordan Borer, President, MAD DADS Minneapolis

Rashad Ahmed, Executive Director, Metro Youth Diversion Center

Leona Martin, MN DEED Senior Administrative Supervisor, West Broadway Livability Coalition

Rebecca Gilgen, Executive Director, Brooklyn Bridge Alliance for Youth

**Breakout Two - Room: Minnesota 2**

Creating protective environments: Responding immediately to trauma

**Moderator**

DeVon Nolen

**Panelists**

Artiste Mayfield, Founder/Executive Director, Grassroots in Action

Kentral Galloway, Director, Next Step Program

Jalilia Abdul-Brown, Executive Director, Change Starts With Community

**Breakout Three - Room: Arbor Lakes**

Connecting young people to caring adults: Mentoring matters

**Moderator**

Antonio Smith

**Panelists**

Jamil Jackson, Executive Director, Change Equals Opportunity

Nikki McComb, Executive Director, Art is My Weapon

Ukasha Dakane, Executive Director, Fortune Relief Youth Empowerment

**Breakout Four - Room: Elm Creek Amphitheatre**

Strengthening young people's skills

**Moderator**

Ifrah Jama

**Panelists**

Suad Maow, Hennepin County Senior Planning Analyst and Pathways Program graduate

Scott Redd, Director, Sabathani Community Center

Dominique Johnson, Trainer and Employment Navigator, HIRED

Farji A. Shaheer, CEO/Founder, Innovative SOULutions



3 p.m.

Break and transition to afternoon plenary

3:30 p.m.

City Leaders Plenary

**Moderator**

Anthony Smith, Cities United  
Executive Director

**Panelists**

Community Safety Commissioner  
Todd Barnette, City of Minneapolis  
Mayor Tim Busse, City of Bloomington  
Mayor Hollies Winston, City of Brooklyn Park  
Mayor James Hovland, City of Edina  
Mayor Mark Steffenson, City of Maple Grove

4:30 p.m.

Closing session with Anthony Smith, Cities  
United Executive Director



## DeVon Nolen

J. DeVon Nolen is the Founder and Market Manager for The Peoples' Market MPLS and former manager of the West Broadway Farmers Market in North Minneapolis. A native of the North Minneapolis community, Nolen has been deeply involved in the betterment of her community for more than 27 years. She is a community activist/organizer who takes great pride in her city and is committed to fighting for fair and just systems at every level and discipline. Her work has focused on community development, housing support, food security, and climate action.

Nolen founded the Northside Black Business Association and the NS Investment Group, a collaborative of local investors, and she is a founding member and former Vice Chair of Partners in Property Commercial Land Trust.

Nolen serves on the Homegrown Minneapolis Food Policy Council Executive Committee and is a Good Food Advocate for the Union of Concerned Scientists.

She is a founding member of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Association of Blacks in Energy, sits on the board of Minneapolis Climate Action, and was a founding member of the Environmental Justice Community Council, where she helped shape the Northside Green Zones resolution.

In 2023, Nolen was recognized for her advocacy work and received a Minneapolis Health Department Public Health Hero award.



## Muna Abdulahi

Muna Abdulahi is a first-generation Somali-American, Black, Muslim, International Spoken Word Poet based in Minneapolis. In 2018, Abdulahi ranked 8th in the Women of the World Poetry Slam Competition and is a three-time Minnesota Grand Slam Poetry Champion. She's performed in over 30 U.S. states and many international countries. Her work has been published/featured both nationally and internationally, including Poetry Foundation, African Poetry Journal, Button Poetry, Somali History Museum, Harvard Advocate, and more. In her work, Abdulahi explores themes of belonging and identity, telling the stories that are erased, silenced, devalued, or buried, the stories that are difficult, the stories that bring together communities, youth, and discussions.



### De'John Brooks, World Youth Connect

De'John Brooks, Co-founder and CEO of the nonprofit W.Y.C. (World Youth Connect), specializes in youth development and community engagement. His lived experience and passion for helping others, coupled with his natural relatability and leadership strengths, paved his path to becoming a pillar in his community. Brooks has built relationships with prestigious organizations such as The Aspen Institute, The Minnesota Science Museum, and M Health Fairview. He is an AmeriCorps alumnus, 2019 Sannah Employee of the year, 2021 Provider of the Year with Change Inc., and member of the Council for Black Male Success. Brooks, now 25, has more than eight years of youth development experience, equipping him with the knowledge and tools needed in to engage with the youth and employers of today.



### Jariah Weglarz, A Mother's Love Initiative

Jariah Weglarz volunteers with A Mother's Love Initiative (AMLI) tutoring junior high and high school students. She turns failing students into scholars and offers mentoring help to them. She is one of the supervisors for youth workers 12-17 years old under the AMLI summer work program.



### Candace Lewis, New Hope Multicultural Advisory Council, Joint Community Police Partnership

Candace Lewis is a senior at Cooper High School and a member of the New Hope Multicultural Advisory Committee (MAC), which is part of the Joint Community Police Partnership (JCPP).



### Drew Richardson, A Mother's Love Initiative

Drew Richardson has lived experience with community violence and shares his background and experiences as a member of the A Mother's Love Initiative's "Boots On The Ground" violence intervention team.



### Janie Ye, Asian Media Access

Janie Ye is a junior at Wayzata High School. She serves on the Executive Board of Sparkway Learning. She enjoys volunteering at different Chinese summer camps for kids and at the Twin Cities Asian Fair. An active participant in Asian Media Access, she writes articles on the effects of racism on Asian American communities.



### Ayub Hussein, Fortune Relief and Youth Empowerment Organization

Ayub Hussein is a senior at Hopkins High School. He is not only a leader on the basketball court but also an active contributor to his community. Through his volunteer work and dedication to helping others, he embodies the values of compassion and service, making a positive impact on those around him. Hussein is a Community Peace Ambassador.



### Kobe Gourneau, Minneapolis American Indian Center

Kobe Gourneau is the Physical Activities and Violence Prevention Specialist at Minneapolis American Indian Center, located in South Minneapolis. MAIC recently opened a new community center and implemented multi-generational programs.



### Known MPLS

Known, MPLS is a community youth choir under the direction of Courtland Pickens. The choral ensemble was established in 2019 as an extension of Voicez, Inc., a 501C, non-profit music organization striving to train and develop the next generation of singers and composers. The group utilizes performance-based music education to galvanize youth between the ages of 12-25 as agents of change by promoting self-esteem, leadership skills, cultural awareness, discipline and a commitment to excellence.

Since its inception, Known has had opportunities to share the stage with some of the most prominent musical artists in the Twin Cities and perform in a wide variety of venues. The choir joined the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra at the Ordway Theater and the Annual Music for the Holidays at the Minneapolis Armory. Live concerts have included the Minneapolis Urban League Gala and the MLK Breakfast at St. Cloud State University. Known has performed alongside Fred Hammond, Hezekiah Walker & Israel Houghton on the Festival of Praise Tour, and Shane & Shane for a National Live TV Broadcast. Known has recorded music with Kaycyy Pluto, Darnell Davis & Maya Buckner, as well as numerous events in local churches, high schools, and community centers.



### Anthony Smith, Cities United Executive Director

Anthony D. Smith is an organizer, a bridge builder, a believer in community, and a thought leader. He currently serves as the Executive Director of Cities United. Under his leadership, the organization has partnered with hundreds of cities who are working to create safe, healthy, and hopeful communities for young Black men and boys, and their families. Before joining Cities United, Anthony led the Office for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods for Mayor Greg Fischer and the City of Louisville. Throughout his professional career, he has made a priority of creating positive outcomes for youth and cultivating up and coming Black leaders. Anthony was born, raised and still lives in Louisville, Kentucky with his wife and family. Anthony earned a bachelor's degree in Political Science, with a minor in Legal Studies from Northern Kentucky University.

# Day 2

8 a.m.

Registration opens  
Continental breakfast provided

9 a.m.

Welcome and Day 1 recap  
Introduction to Cities United

9:25 a.m.

Morning Plenary #1: Developing and implementing a comprehensive public safety plan

**Moderator**

Synethia White, Director of the Dept. of Strategic Initiatives, Cities United

**Panelists**

Erica Atwood, CEO, First Degree Consulting, Philadelphia, Pa.

Malcolm Cunningham, Director, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety & Engagement, City of Toledo, Ohio

Mayor Christopher Curtis, City of Kankakee, Ill.

10:35 a.m.

Morning Plenary # 2: Interrupting community violence: Building out your CVI ecosystem

**Moderator**

Marcus Ellis, Executive Director, Peace for DC, Washington, D.C.

**Panelists**

Dr. Chico Tillmon, Director, Community Violence Intervention (CVI) Leadership Academy, Chicago, Ill.

Rodney McIntosh, Director, Violence Intervention and Prevention Fort Worth, Fort Worth, Texas

Dr. Monique Williams, Executive Director, Cure Violence Global

11:35 a.m.

Transition to breakouts

11:45 a.m.

Breakout sessions

**CVI 101**

Dr. Eddie Woods, CEO, No More Red Dots, Inc., Louisville, Ky.

Room: Minnesota 1

**Data matters**

LaTonya "Abys" Denson, Special Projects Administrator, Cities United

Room: Minnesota 2

**Engaging young leaders**

Rachel Askew, Senior Associate of Young Leader Programming, Cities United

Room: Arbor Lakes

**Creating a coordinated response**

Andre Canty, Senior Associate of National Initiatives, Cities United

Room: Elm Creek Amphitheatre

**Accessing federal resources**

Amber Goodwin, Founder, Community Justice and Assistant District Attorney, Travis County, Texas

Room: Lake Michigan (lower level)

**Telling your story**

Justin Reid, Director of Storytelling, Cities United

Room: Lake Huron (lower level)

11:45 a.m.

Elected Officials Huddle

**Facilitator**

Anthony Smith, Cities United Executive Director

1 p.m.

Transition to lunch and keynote

1:10 p.m.

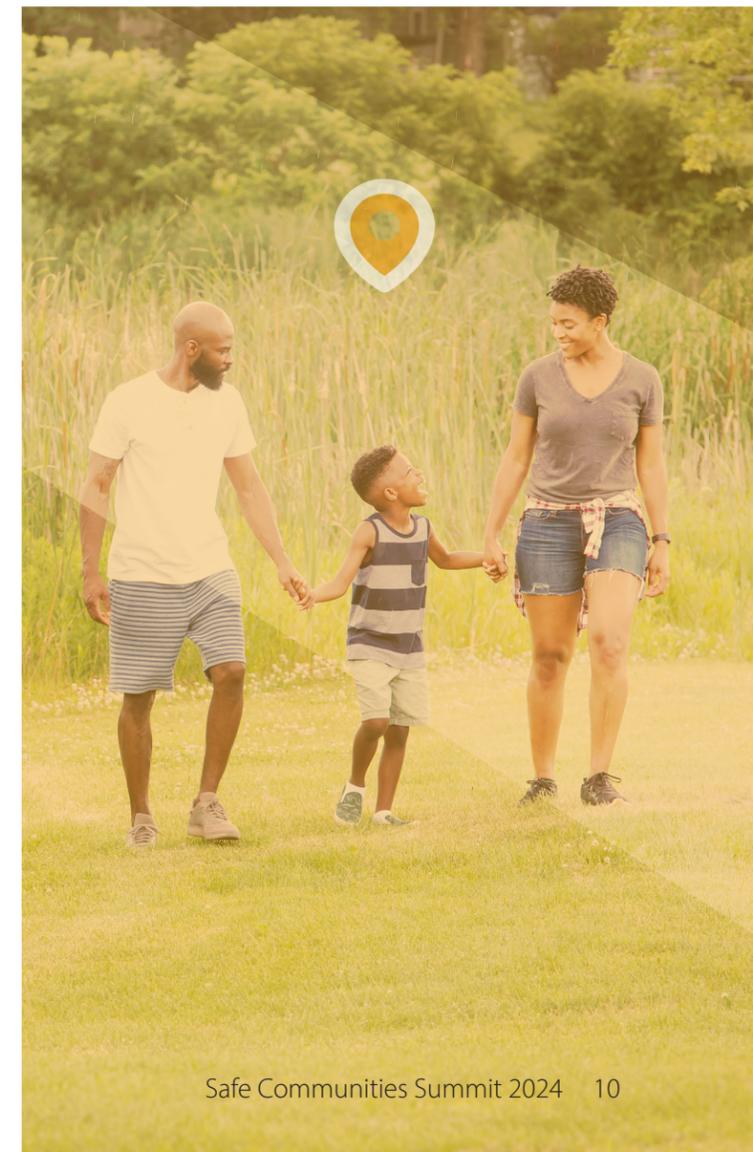
Lunch and keynote address

Eduardo "Eddie" Bocanegra, Senior Advisor for Community Violence Intervention, Department of Justice (DOJ)

Sasha Cotton, Executive Director, National Network for Safe Communities

2:15 p.m.

Transition to breakouts



2:30 p.m.

Breakout sessions

### CVI 101

Dr. Eddie Woods, CEO, No More Red Dots, Inc., Louisville, Ky.

Room: Minnesota 1

### Data matters

LaTonya “Abys” Denson, Special Projects Administrator, Cities United

Room: Minnesota 2

### Engaging young leaders

Rachel Askew, Senior Associate of Young Leader Programming, Cities United

Room: Arbor Lakes

### Creating a coordinated response

Andre Canty, Senior Associate of National Initiatives, Cities United

Room: Elm Creek Amphitheatre

### Accessing federal resources

Amber Goodwin, Founder, Community Justice and Assistant District Attorney, Travis County, Texas

Room: Lake Michigan (lower level)

### Telling your story

Justin Reid, Director of Storytelling, Cities United

Room: Lake Huron (lower level)

4 p.m.

Closing session and next steps

Pulling it all together

Anthony Smith, Cities United  
Executive Director

How to stay engaged

Jeffrey Lunde, Hennepin County  
District 1 Commissioner

5 - 7 p.m.

Networking event

**Performance**

Irreducible Grace



## Synethia White

Synethia White is the Director of Strategic Initiatives for Cities United. In her current role she is responsible for designing, strengthening, and implementing Cities United’s strategic vision related to national programming and partner city engagement. She has over 15 years of experience in public service at the local and state level. She has established citizen-led community-based initiatives, organized regional violence prevention efforts in Hampton Roads, facilitated process improvement efforts, extensive proposal development and experience managing grants valued at over \$1 million. White previously worked for the City of Newport News, Virginia and the State of Virginia at Virginia Commonwealth University. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Old Dominion University, and a Certificate in Nonprofit Management from Tidewater Community College. The importance of serving others was instilled in White at an early age by her grandmother. White is a member of the Hampton Roads Affiliate of The National Black Child Development Institute, the Bethea Family Foundation and the Hampton Roads Police Athletic League. She resides in Hampton, Va. with her family.



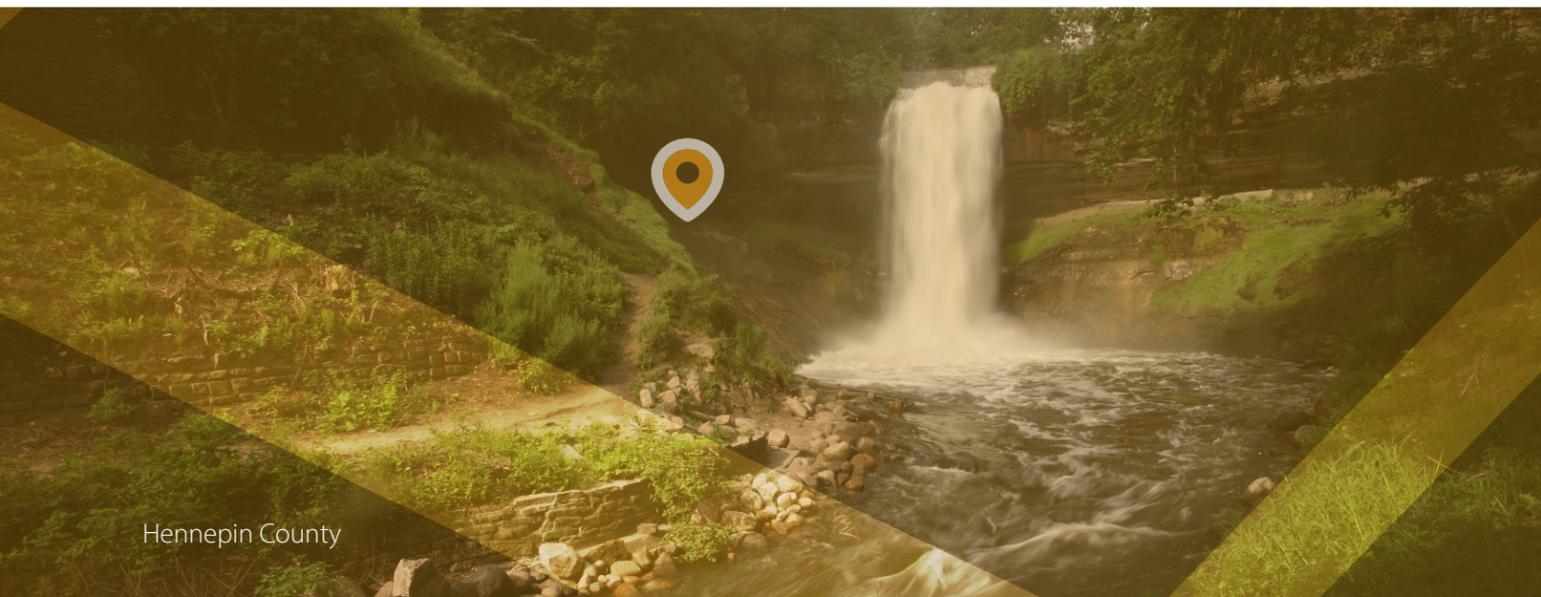
## Erica Atwood

Toni Morrison once implored, “As you enter positions of trust and power, dream a little before you think.” Erica Atwood—mentor, coach, people lover, problem solver and troublemaker—centers her work around this principle.

Her proof is in her partnerships, which range from the boutique grassroots non-profit to mayor’s offices, national foundations to community organizations. Her imprint can be found in a history of engagements and initiatives that include the arts, racial and social justice, community revitalization, and youth leadership.

Atwood has over two decades of experience in communications, project management, community outreach, policy-making, and advocacy. She is an experienced public speaker, trained mediator, and an innovative facilitator. She is the founder of First Degree Consulting and most recently served as the Deputy Managing Director and Senior Director of the Office of Policy and Strategic Initiatives for Criminal Justice and Public Safety for the City of Philadelphia.

Atwood engages everyone in her own village of clients and friends from a profound place of truth, told from a place of love.





## Malcolm Cunningham

Malcolm Cunningham leads the City of Toledo Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE). MONSE is building a multi-sector, evidence-informed, and community-engaged approach to neighborhood safety that addresses the root causes of gun violence in Toledo. As Director, Cunningham oversees the community and school-based Save Our Community violence intervention and prevention programs; the Community Action Table comprised of stakeholders throughout the violence intervention and prevention ecosystem; and the development and implementation of the City of Toledo's 5-Year Plan for Neighborhood Safety.

Cunningham's career has included building schools in Malawi, developing youth health camps in Rwanda, case management with "high-risk" youth, and establishing an urban farm that taught youth with mental illnesses how to grow and prepare organic food.

Regardless of where he intervenes, grounding his work in community voice and choice are guiding principles. Towards that end, Cunningham co-designed a community engagement process that invested \$2.8 million in his childhood neighborhood, redlined in the late 1930s. Cunningham graduated from Ohio State with a BS in Psychology and is currently a Bloomberg American Health Initiative Fellow in the violence focus area at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.



## Mayor Christopher Curtis

Christopher W. Curtis was elected mayor of the city of Kankakee in 2021. Prior to becoming mayor, he served the community for nine years as a 6th Ward Alderman.

As mayor, Curtis is passionate about the city of Kankakee and has focused on developing and implementing plans to reduce crime, increase technology within city departments, strengthen neighborhoods, and encourage economic development.

In 2022, Mayor Curtis created Kankakee's Office of Violence Prevention to combat the increase in violence stemming from the pandemic, domestic violence, mental illness and the proliferation of guns on the street. The plan has resulted in a year-over-year decline in the number of homicides and the overall violent crime rate. Mayor Curtis' priorities include initiatives designed to revitalize and improve the city's most disadvantaged neighborhoods by partnering with local stakeholders to leverage resources to create a more equitable and prosperous city for all.

In his personal time Mayor Curtis loves golf, travel, and has coached grade school cross country for the past 10 years. He finds great pride in working with children to help bring out the best of them achieve their personal goals and teaching them life lessons that can be used in the future.



## Marcus Ellis

Marcus Ellis joined Peace For DC as Executive Director in April 2023. He previously served as the Chief of Staff at the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, in the Executive Office of the Mayor of Washington, D.C. In this position, Ellis has spent several years overseeing some of Washington, D.C.'s innovations in community violence intervention. His office has fostered a community-oriented model that is rooted in a public health approach to reducing violence.

At Peace For DC, Ellis leads the organization's efforts to harness philanthropic investments in a comprehensive violence reduction strategy for the District of Columbia. In doing this work, Ellis strives to increase neighborhood safety and decrease the likelihood of criminal justice involvement for the city's most vulnerable residents. Community violence intervention efforts are focused on improving the outcomes of education, workforce development, mental health and wellness, and housing stability for those who are most likely to be harmed, or cause harm.

While focusing on impacting some of our most vulnerable residents within his career, Ellis also dedicates his personal time to giving back to the community as Founder and CEO of Giving with a Purpose, a nonprofit organization in the metropolitan D.C. area.

Ellis serves as a Board Member for Cities United.



## Dr. Chico Tillmon

Chico Tillmon, PhD, is the Director of the Community Violence Intervention (CVI) Leadership Academy, a training program for community-based organizations, offices of violence prevention, hospital violence intervention, and other components of the CVI ecosystem. Previously, Dr. Tillmon was Executive Director of Heartland Alliance's READI National Center for Safer Communities, which provides capacity building and training for cities, communities, and CVI organizations nationwide. Dr. Tillmon serves on the leadership team of the Black and Brown Peace Consortium and is the former executive director of the YMCA of Metro Chicago's Youth Safety and Violence Prevention programs.

Dr. Tillmon's lived experience is the backdrop for his focus on community change. He works with youth, young adults, and direct service providers to help them hone their skills and improve their work performance. He has been a leading national consultant and trainer on violence prevention and reentry for more than a decade.

Dr. Tillmon has received several awards and recognitions for his work in violence prevention, including: 2022 Alumnus of the Year from the University of Illinois at Chicago Criminology, Law, and Justice Department; 2021 recognition by President Joe Biden and invitation to the White House; 2018 Congressional Veterans Braintrust Award; 2017 Ford Men of Courage Award; and 2016 Practitioner of the Year by the University of Illinois at Chicago Criminology, Law, and Justice Department.



## Rodney McIntosh

Rodney McIntosh is the Director of Violence Intervention and Prevention Fort Worth (VIPFW), a nonprofit organization whose sole focus is to reduce cyclical and retaliatory gun violence in the city of Fort Worth, Texas. VIPFW works with young men from the ages of 11- 29. Through this work, McIntosh has worked with numerous young men in the inner city, teaching lessons on conflict resolution, de-escalation, emotional intelligence, and how to deal with Adverse Childhood Experiences – all with the goal of equipping them for the future.



## Dr. Monique Williams

Dr. Monique Williams is an accomplished public health professional, researcher, and practitioner, with extensive experience in violence prevention. Fueled by her determination to see communities of color whole, healed, and thriving, she passionately advocates for implementing community-driven approaches to address all forms of violence.

Dr. Williams is the Executive Director of Cure Violence Global, leading the organization through significant growth and international expansion. Previously, Dr. Williams was the Director of the Louisville Mayor’s Office for Safe & Healthy Neighborhoods, where she oversaw the development and execution of the city’s strategic plan for reducing violence, including its implementation of the Cure Violence approach. She has also led the University of Louisville’s National Center of Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention, one of five centers designated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to advance the science and practice of youth violence prevention.



## Dr. Eddie Woods

Dr. Eddie Woods, is CEO of No More Red Dots, Inc. in Louisville, Ky., an organization working to end gun violence and recidivism by providing opportunities and access to resources for organizations and individuals in need. Dr. Woods has over 30 years of experience providing consultation for and working with community groups, law enforcement, higher education, gangs, and youths. His focus has been on safe schools and communities, gun violence intervention, gang and drug dealing intervention, mediations, youth program development, and family support.

Dr. Woods has received several awards and recognitions for his work, including: Two Distinguished Citizen Awards; 2000 HUD Best Programs/Practices Award, 2001 Outstanding Youth Service Worker Award; 2005 recipient of the National Urban League’s Unsung Heroes Award (services to youth/families); 2008 LEO Magazine Louisvillian of the Year (services in gang/drug intervention); 2014 UofL Community Spirit Award; 2014 Molly Leonard Community Service Award; 2015 West Louisville Connector; 2015 BMA Prize for Giving; 2017 Health in All Policies Award; 2018 Harvard-Kennedy School Alumni; one of the 19 Fascinating People in Louisville for 2019 (Courier-Journal); 2022 Innovator Award (Cities United); and the 2023 Trinity HS Peace Medal.



## LaTonya ‘Abys’ Denson

LaTonya ‘Abys’ Denson is the Special Projects Administrator at Cities United, where she coordinates the organization’s continuous improvement and monitoring activities and assists with project management and strategic planning. Hailing from Newport News, Va., Denson is a mother of two whose life mirrors her dedication to creating safer, thriving communities. She founded Abu Unity in honor of her eldest daughter’s father, a victim of gun violence, in 2003. The organization fights community violence through mentorship, coalitions, and partnerships aimed at fostering peace.

Denson participated in the Virginia Civic Engagement Table’s (VCET) Progressive Leadership Project before becoming the Director and later Data and Technology Manager of VCET’s Young Virginia Votes Center. There, she focused on using data to inform the advocacy work of partner nonprofit organizations.

Denson chaired Square Table, a coalition of Black-led violence intervention, prevention, and re-entry grassroots organizations, where she promoted best practices, regional coordination and hosted trainings. And she is a member of the Virginia Community Violence Coalition.

Her work reflects a commitment to community well-being and civic engagement, making her a trailblazer in her field.



## Rachel Askew

Rachel Askew is a dedicated advocate for youth empowerment, violence prevention, and equitable communities. As the Senior Associate of Young Leader Programming at Cities United since 2021, she has led the Young Leader Fellowship Program, graduating 40 out of 62 young leader fellowship alumni and is an alumnus of the program herself. Askew has also organized annual National Youth Violence Prevention Week town halls, amplifying the voices of hundreds of youth nationwide on community gaps and solutions to gun violence.

Askew’s commitment to a social justice youth development approach has resonated widely, as she actively engages in ending community-based gun violence. Prior to her role at Cities United, Askew made significant contributions as a youth worker and community development specialist impacting young people and families across Tacoma, WA.

Rooted in Tacoma, Askew remains dedicated to building a brighter future for youth and communities, leveraging the power of young leaders to drive meaningful change.



## Andre Canty

Andre Canty manages Cities United’s portfolio of national initiatives. He is a past president of 100 Black Men of Greater Knoxville and co-founder of several social justice organizations. He is also a widely published writer and a former Cities United young leader and youth advocate.



## Amber Goodwin

Amber Goodwin is the founder of Community Justice and Community Justice Action Fund (CJAF), a gun violence prevention organization that builds power with and for Black and brown communities to end gun violence. Goodwin is also an Assistant District Attorney in Travis County, Texas, where she works in the Special Victims Unit and serves as liaison to the Office of Violence Prevention for the City of Austin.

Goodwin previously served as National Advocacy Director for Giffords, the gun violence prevention organization founded by former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and U.S. Senator Mark Kelly. In 2019, Goodwin testified at a U.S. Congressional Judiciary Committee hearing on urban gun violence and in 2020-2021 she was part of the Biden-Harris transition team for gun violence prevention.

In her local community, Goodwin served as Chair of the Austin Gun Violence Task force and she supported Travis County efforts to secure federal funds for hospital-based violence prevention work and a prosecutor-led gun diversion program in 2022.

Goodwin was named to the Washingtonian Most Influential List for 2022, 2018 Essence Magazine “Woke 100,” 2017 Root 100 List of the most influential African Americans, and the 2016 Women’s “Power50” list for Walkers Legacy. She is a Next Gen Fellow with the University of Texas Strauss School for International Security and Law and a member of the Texas Southern University HBCU Criminal Justice Research Lab.



## Justin Reid

Justin Reid is the Director of Storytelling for Cities United. Since 2015, he has been assisting Cities United craft stories, elevate voices and strengthen messaging to supporters, partners, and the network at large. Filmmaker, Creative Strategist and Producer, Reid found his upstart in the creative field working with nonprofits and government agencies to produce and illustrate compelling stories that serve a real purpose. Drawing from a love for culture and the production of innovative and relevant content, Reid uses his technical skills to uplift and drive the messaging and narrative of Cities United forward.



## Eduardo “Eddie” Bocanegra

Eddie Bocanegra, Senior Advisor for Community Violence Intervention at the Department of Justice (DOJ), works closely with the Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs. Before joining the DOJ, Bocanegra held the position of Executive Director at READI Chicago within Heartland Alliance. In this capacity, he managed and implemented evidence-based, trauma-informed programs aimed at reducing gun violence and fostering safety and opportunity within the city.

With a strong background in community-based organizations and programs addressing trauma and resiliency in violence-affected communities, Bocanegra previously served as the executive director of the YMCA of Chicago’s Youth Safety and Violence Prevention program. During his tenure, he oversaw programs like Urban Warriors and Bridging the Divide, which emphasized trauma-informed approaches. Before joining the YMCA, he worked as a congregational organizer for Community Renewal Society, where he led FORCE, a coalition advocating for increased opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals. His work, featured in the documentary “The Interrupters,” has gained recognition through media outlets like CBS and NPR. Bocanegra holds master’s and bachelor’s degrees in social work from the University of Chicago and Northeastern Illinois University, respectively. He has actively contributed to Chicago’s public safety initiatives and has been engaged in various committees and boards, focusing on criminal justice reform and juvenile justice.

His expertise extends to international platforms, as he has presented and spoken at the United Nations, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, and prestigious institutions such as Harvard University, Yale University, and Columbia University. The U.S. Department of State has recognized his insights by inviting him to U.S. Embassies in Madrid, Haiti, and Uganda to discuss trauma and its relation to community violence.



## Sasha Cotton

Sasha Cotton is the Executive Director of the National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College. Prior to joining the National Network for Safe Communities (NNSC), Cotton led violence prevention work in Minneapolis for nearly a decade, including designing and serving as the first director of the Minneapolis Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) in the Minneapolis Health Department. During her time as the Minneapolis OVP Director, Cotton oversaw the design and implementation of a comprehensive community violence intervention approach which includes the NNSC’s Group Violence Intervention strategy, a hospital-based violence intervention program, and street outreach workers. During her tenure, she played a crucial role in the city as it faced the murder of George Floyd and the unrest that followed.

Prior to serving as the OVP Director, Cotton served as the National Resource Center Coordinator at The Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC), as well as serving as the Prevention Program Manager for Violence Free Minnesota — the state’s domestic violence coalition. She is currently representing Minnesota on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and is the Vice President of the African American Leadership Council in Saint Paul.



# 11th Annual Convening SEATTLE

October 2 - October 4

Sign up for updates on the 11th Annual  
Convening at [linktree.com/citiesunited](https://linktree.com/citiesunited)

## Join Us This Year

Cities United's Annual Convening is the gathering place for all of us working to affect the lives of those most impacted by gun violence. We attract leaders from across the country, uniting under the goal of making the lives of Black men and boys and their families safe, healthy, and hopeful. Our three days together are full of learning, sharing, growing, and collaborating. Join us this year as we work to equip cities with the necessary tools to move from learning to leading.