

Our Inspiration: “I choose to identify with the underprivileged, I choose to identify with the poor, I choose to give my life for the hungry, I choose to give my life for those who have been left out of the sunlight of opportunity. . . This is the way I’m going. If it means suffering a little bit, I’m going that way. If it means sacrificing, I’m going that way. If it means dying for them, I’m going that way, because I heard a voice saying “DO SOMETHING FOR OTHERS.” We choose to dome something for Boys and Men of Color. ~ Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Good afternoon,

To the Assemblymembers present and the Chair of this Select Committee, the Honorable Sandre Swanson, I want to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation for the courage and commitment shown by you our leaders to convene such a hearing to amplify the needs of Boys and Men of Color in our state and region.

My name is Micahel McBride, and I am the Executive Director of Berkeley Organizing Congregations for Action and the National Staff Director for the PICO Lifelines to Healing Campaign. I stand here as a life long native of the Bay Area, born and raised in the Bayview Hunter’s Point community of San Francisco, and now living, working and pastoring a congregation in the East Bay. I stand here as a representative of a working group of hundreds of faith based and community based organizations who have been committed to regularly meeting, organizing and imagining what meaningful recommendations can be made to this committee as we address the lived experience of Boys and Men of Color in general, and particularly, their safety in our communities along with their just treatment in our justice system. I stand here as a pastor of The Way Christian Center in Berkeley, who has had to personally bury 5 young people from the East Bay, 4 black males and 1 black young female, over the past 4 years. I am convinced that this is the moment where we must collectively stand in unison with you as our leaders and declare that Boys and Men of Color in our state deserve and will have much better under our watch.

While the experience of Boys and Men of Color has always been characterized by significant challenges, we must all acknowledge that we are at a moment when too often Boys and Men of Color are considered THE PROBLEM. We want to declare and affirm that Boys and Men of Color are not THE PROBLEM. That indeed, while we may have problems, we are and must be considered major assets in realizing the solutions we all desperately seek for the well being and prosperity of our communities. And we want to insist that this hope and belief must be reflected in the policies of our state and local municipalities.

We believe a necessary focus on the safety and well being of our communities where Boys and Men of Color live must be a high priority. Because quite frankly, we can’t help Boys and Men of Color, if they are already dead! We believe this focus must be grounded in the principles and assumptions of gun violence prevention best practices, restorative justice principles and respectful, meaningful partnerships between community members, decision makers, law enforcement and social service organizations. One such example of

this is the Lifelines to Healing Campaign, a strategy of 14 PICO faith based federations and community based organizations in over 20 cities in CA, including 5 in the Bay Area.

The Lifelines to Healing Campaign is a national movement of the PICO network of faith-based organizations and congregations committed to addressing the causes of pervasive violence and social disintegration in our communities. We believe that the criminalization and mass incarceration of people of color, coupled with the lack of meaningful economic opportunities, have contributed to a state of moral and social crisis in our country. Through our national network of faith-based communities, Lifelines to Healing promotes organizing efforts that will influence state and federal policies and promote local initiatives to stop violence, decrease incarceration, and expand economic opportunities.

We believe our key policy aspirations to be:

1. Reducing youth violence through proven strategies and collaborations like Ceasefire and other holistic public health violence interventions, without sending more young men of color to jail
2. Pay special attention to the criminalization and mass incarceration of people of color through the failed drug war policies and the emerging detention centers for low level immigrant persons;
3. Address the barriers that exist to successful re-entry and re-integration of formerly incarcerated people into our communities - public housing, public benefits, rights to vote, right to work, etc.,
4. Creating a public health approach to addressing community violence. Dr Joseph Marshall of the Omega Boys Club and Street Soldiers declare that violence is a disease and we must treat it and fight it like a disease. It's not just a criminal justice issue that engenders criminal justice responses, but a public health challenge that requires a response using similar assumptions.

The best learning and independent evaluations of the models being advocated (like Boston Ceasefire, Drug Market Intervention, Group Violence Reduction Strategies, etc) have been able to successfully reduce gun violence, create opportunities for high need individuals, address the mass incarceration of our young men and produce well resourced pathways for formerly incarcerated individuals. Such strategies, programs and interventions mentioned above are the most highly rated by the United States Department of Justice as well. In short, holistic programs and models must be employed, resourced and mandated in our communities so we can save lives. We want to insist that such best practices be used as benchmarks for law enforcement agencies in our state.

And even further, we look to our leaders to incentivize the full implementation of these programs and interventions, with intentional partnerships and collaborations with skilled and reputable community institutions and members. We believe that the failure to accelerate the full implementation of these strategies and their full funding, unnecessarily costs us more precious lives that we cannot afford to lose. Its within our power to do so...and we believe we must throw out Lifelines to Healing now!!! The value and worth

of the lives of Boys and Men of Color in this state deserves our expediency and immediate response.

Over the 5 years that we have waged this campaign, our work has grown from 2 PICO federations in Alameda County to 14 across the state including federations in the Central Valley and Southern California. Overwhelming, clergy and lay leaders have put their hope in the Ceasefire Strategy. While there are different definitions of the Ceasefire strategy, we have seen that successful models across California and the country include 4 necessary components:

1. Building a Community Partnership (The working group): Successful Ceasefire implementations understand the importance of community and civic leadership working together to articulate a strong anti-violence message. Working groups generally consist of Law Enforcement Agencies, Community Based Service Providers, city economic and development agencies and community leaders, clergy, community organizers and formerly incarcerated people that plan the implementation.
2. Data Driven Strategy: Police and community relationships are often strained due to unfocused enforcement efforts that end in the massive profiling of boys and men of color. Successful Ceasefire strategies rely on a data driven approach where an outside expert combs through 2-4 years of homicide cases to understand who the key groups/gangs are that are involved in conflict, who the players are in these gangs and where the violence is located. The working group is able to take this data to plan a city specific Ceasefire implementation.
3. Communication Tools: Often called a “Call-in” the working group employs respectful face to face communication to deliver the anti-violence message. Other communication tools include clergy led night walks, customized notifications and community building activities such as barbeques, where the anti-violence message can be re-enforced.
4. Employment and Services: Many young men that are touched by violence and identified as participants in Ceasefire need to be supported in a number of ways to help them step away from the streets. Services can include: mental health, life skills, educational placement, job placement etc.

PICO Federations, Clergy and congregations have partnered over the past two years at the state level to ensure Ceasefire as defined above, is supported and well resourced. We see several opportunities to integrate Ceasefire work into police departments across the state including:

- Strengthening the role of the Board of State and Community Corrections in guiding funding for Ceasefire implementation:
  - Ensure that current CalGRIP funds (which will be managed by the BSCC starting 2012 ) are dedicated to evidence based programs including

Ceasefire. Within the CalGRIP funding stream, it will be critical to incentivize community based partnerships, funding for technical assistance and problem analysis

- Ensuring that the CalGRIP RFP's allow for cities who are receiving CalGRIP funding are eligible to receive future grants to both continue and expand implementation
- Supporting the ballot initiative to redefine the three strikes law and the over-punitive nature of non-violent drug offenses that sweep thousands of Boys and Men of Color into the criminal justice system; ending the drug war
- Providing more well resourced mental health interventions and programs for detained youth and adults who are in need of healing from trauma

These are just highlights of what we believe can be done NOW to address the public safety and criminal justice reform needs of Boys and Men of Color. We invite you to pay particular attention to the full set of recommendations submitted today in our report, and in the days and months to come.

We do not believe we have time to spare or waste. While there was a time we could assign blame and responsibility to those outside our communities for the policies and decisions being made, we are at a moment where it is clear, it is within OUR power to do the right thing NOW. We urge you, we implore you, we commit to walk with you and support you. Let's make the lives of Boys and Men of Color full of opportunities and vitality. As Dr. Joseph Marshall of the Omega Boys Club declares, let's do everything we can to keep our loved ones ALIVE AND FREE!