

# Memphis' Youth Violence Prevention Efforts put a Focus on the Faith Based Community

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Members of the federal government, Memphis Police and faith-based and community organization join youth participants to focus on Memphis City Wide Youth Violence Prevention Plan in Trezvant High School, Memphis, TN.

I recently had the privilege of representing the Department of Justice and White House Office of Faith Based & Neighborhood Partnerships as part of a site visit to Memphis, TN along with colleagues from DOJ, DOL, EDU, HHS and HUD, focusing on Memphis' City Wide Youth Violence Prevention Plan.

I am particularly impressed with the way in which they have prioritized the faith-based community as a key partner in their youth violence prevention efforts. Pastor Keith Norman, Memphis's lead on faith-based community engagement masterfully facilitating a faith-based Leaders Panel and Luncheon. Congressman Steve Cohen shared about the importance of the Faith Community in Memphis and Reverend Walter Smith, Pastor Michael Ellis discussed the practical service delivery that their churches provide and how their churches function as community and resource centers for the local residents in the target area. They along with Harold Collins (Special Assistant to the Shelby County District Attorney General), challenged the Faith leaders in the room to find a way to contribute to Memphis' Youth Violence Prevention Plan.

There were several highlights to the two day visit:

- During the visit we met with both Memphis Mayor A C Wharton and Shelby County Mayor Mark Luttrell, Police Director Tony Armstrong, along with state representatives including Public Safety Commissioner Bill Gibbons and the commissioners of TN Corrections and Parole, as well as US Attorney Edward Stanton III and Congressman Steve Cohen all who expressed the stressed the importance of partnerships with the Faith community in Memphis.
- While visiting the Memphis and Shelby County Juvenile Court with Chief Judge Curtis PersonI was pleased to learn that they have been able to divert many low level offenders from having to be detained in their detention facility and in doing so have been able operate at about 40% of their available cells.
- We were very fortunate to sit in on a presentation of the GRASSY (Gang Reduction Assistance for Saving Society's Youth) Student Roundtable at Trezevant High School. This presentation was facilitated by Chief Gerald Darling and Anthony Hicks and was followed by a conversation between the Federal team and the youth participants about role models, peer pressure, employment and the groups desire to visit Washington, D.C.

I want to especially thank the Memphis Police Department who demonstrated incredible hospitality and led us on a bus tour of the target area in North Memphis the Freyser Neighborhood which has the highest level of crime and violence in the city. The last stop on the tour was at Impact Baptist Church a key community partner to hear a presentation about the work they are doing from Pastor Mike Ellis. Shelby County Sheriff Bill Oldham also joined us at Impact and spoke about a Juvenile unit of the adult prison which houses juveniles charged with adult crimes. With a theme "There's Hope" juvenile inmates participate in a program that provides them with education, mentoring and therapy.

[Learn more about the work that can be done in your community to help prevent youth violence.](#)