



Residents rally to 'Save Lives Now!'

3,000 attend meeting, call on Oakland officials to 'Save Lives Now!'

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VIDEO

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OAKLAND

Thousands of residents affected by homicide piled into the Oakland Convention Center on Thursday evening with one purpose in mind — to "Save Lives Now!"

That was the theme of the citywide meeting, which attracted about 3,000 residents and faith leaders who called on city officials to help put an end to gun violence and the crime terrorizing their neighborhoods. They asked public officials to support and implement an intervention and prevention plan, known as the Oakland Strategy.

The event was organized by various groups, including Oakland Community Organizations, Pastors of Oakland and several other ministerial organizations.

"A bullet doesn't have a name," said Yolanda Steen, 41, a community leader who shared her experience about the violence she sees living in East Oakland. "Gun violence seems to be creeping closer and closer to my home."

Steen lives at the intersection of 82nd Avenue and MacArthur Boulevard, about half a block from where Shaneice Davis, a 21-year-old mother, was killed when a stray bullet came through the wall of her bedroom while she was sleeping.

"I didn't want to believe it happened, that another person died for no reason," said Steen. "That really bothers me, people getting shot inside their homes and not even outdoors anymore."

Other residents including parents and youth, talked openly about the gun violence that has touched their lives and the desire to make their communities safer. They said they want to see their Measure Y tax dollars actively coordinated through the mayor's office to focus on those most at risk for gun violence. In addition, residents would like to see more money allocated to street-based outreach workers, who would directly connect young people to job training and placement.


So far this year, there have been 55 homicides in Oakland, compared to 38 at this time last year. Almost every day, new shrines are resurrected to memorialize the lives of lost loved ones, residents said.

City officials and faith leaders agreed that there needs to be a more targeted and coordinated approach to confront violence and create hope for a better quality of life.

"The price of life isn't worth 50 cents," said Anna Neal, 43, a Hayward resident who was born and raised in Oakland. "People get killed over stupid things like the way you look at someone."

According to recent police homicide data, in the past 10 years there have been about 1,059 murders on Oakland streets.


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"The reality is that all of us collectively are running out of excuses," said City Council President Ignacio De La Fuente (Glenview-Fruitvale). "We need to be at the table, and we need to be accountable."

De La Fuente said that it is the council's responsibility to allocate funds to the Measure Y programs that are working and to eliminate the ones that are not. This weekend, 20 street outreach workers will be deployed to address street-level violence as part of Mayor Ron Dellums' overall public safety strategy.

The police are also doing their part to stem the tide of violence and recently began a new geographic policing model, which includes three police captains in charge of area commands in North, West, Central and East Oakland. In addition, patrol officers work 12-hour shifts in order to provide greater police presence on the street during peak crime hours. Oakland police Chief Wayne Tucker said the police will continue to be involved with the strategy at both the policy level and delivering services.

The Rev. Jesus Neito Ruiz, pastor at St. Anthony's Church, said he participated in the meeting because violence must end and healing must begin. He said members of his congregation still feel a great deal of pain from the incident in which a 13-year-old boy was wounded in a drive-by shooting outside the church. The boy was attending a memorial service for Jose Luis Buenrostro-Gonzalez, 15, who was shot to death March 19.

"The wounds are open," he said. "Our role in the faith community is to challenge the status quo in a way that is intentional so that there's accountability and participation on everyone's part."

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