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Center for Gun Policy and Research

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Joshua Sharfstein, MD
Commissioner
Baltimore City Health Department
1001 E. Fayette Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Dr. Sharfstein:

Our research team has completed our interim evaluation of the *Safe Streets* program. The report is attached and our findings and interpretations of the data are summarized below.

Our evaluation sought to: 1) describe the implementation of the program, 2) estimate program effects on attitudes supportive of using guns to settle disputes on a key target group – males ages 18-24 years, and 3) estimate program impacts on two important public safety outcomes – homicides and nonfatal shootings. Program implementation was described using data from reports submitted by the community organizations implementing *Safe Streets*. The effects of *Safe Streets* on attitudes supportive of gun violence was examined with survey data collected from young males ages 18-24 years in one community which had implemented the program about five months prior to data collection (McElderry Park), in another community that was gearing up to implement the program (Union Square), and in a third community that had applied for *Safe Streets* funding but was not slated to implement the program (Oliver).

To estimate program effects on homicides and nonfatal shootings, we analyzed trends in those outcomes for each police post with data obtained from the Baltimore Police Department. We used regression models that employed so-called “difference-in-difference” estimators of program impact. Such estimators essentially contrast pre- and post-implementation changes in neighborhoods where *Safe Streets* was implemented with changes between the same time periods for police posts with historically high numbers of shootings that did not implement the program. We control for baseline means for murders and nonfatal shootings, illegal weapons, arrests for drugs, and calendar month.

The key findings are:

Program Implementation

- The program was well implemented in McElderry Park where there was extensive outreach to high-risk “clients,” hundreds of monthly contacts with clients, and 53 mediations of potentially-lethal disputes over 15 months of implementation.

- Although the community group in Union Square was funded in August 2007, program implementation was delayed for many months and only resulted in five months of significant program activity. This resulted in the decision to not renew the contract for this site.
- Safe Streets East was expanded in early 2008 to include the Ellwood Park neighborhood with full program implementation beginning in April. However, the number of clients, client contacts, and mediations in Ellwood Park were less than in McElderry Park.

Effects on Attitudes Supportive of Using Guns to Settle Disputes

- Young men in McElderry Park, where *Safe Streets* had been implemented for about 5 months, were much less likely than in the two neighborhoods that had not implemented the program to hold attitudes supportive of using guns to resolve disputes.

Effects on homicides and nonfatal shootings

- McElderry Park has not experienced a single homicide over 17 months of full program implementation – a highly statistically significant reduction. Based on our models of homicide trends, one would have expected 4 homicides in McElderry Park during that time period had they not implemented the program.
- *Safe Streets* implementation was associated with significant reductions in homicides of victims under 30 years-old in McElderry Park and in the police posts bordering Ellwood Park.
- *Safe Streets* was associated with significant reductions in nonfatal shootings in Ellwood Park, but also with an increase in McElderry Park because reductions there were not as great as those registered in non-intervention comparison areas.

The certainty with which we can infer direct program effects from the associations derived from a “natural experiment” is limited. Studies of this type are limited by the difficulty of measuring factors that lead to increases (e.g., battles between gangs, changes in local drug markets) or decreases (e.g., policing initiatives, heightened supervision of high-risk parolees and probationers) in gun violence. Thus our estimates of program effect are highly dependent upon assumptions that important determinants of gun violence that were not directly measured were unrelated to program implementation.

However, we know that new law enforcement initiatives such as the deployment of the Violent Crime Impact Division (VCID) were launched in some hot spots for gun violence in West and East Baltimore at approximately the same time that *Safe Streets* was implemented in McElderry Park. Our analyses indicate that murders and nonfatal shootings declined 32 percent and 39 percent, respectively, from the time period before to after *Safe Streets* was implemented in August 2007 in neighborhoods in the top quartile of shootings during 2003-2006 that did not implement *Safe Streets*. Thus, the new law enforcement efforts may have contributed to substantial reductions in gun violence throughout the city.

Our interim evaluation of *Safe Streets* is also limited by the relatively small number of months that the program has been in place in only a few neighborhoods to date. We would expect that it may take

a number of months of program operation for the intervention to translate into significant reductions in gun violence. For one of the sites (Ellwood Park), we had only six months of data during program implementation and for another (Union Square) we only had five months during which the program was implemented, albeit with problems, as indicated above.

A recent study by researchers from Northwestern University conducted a very rigorous evaluation of Chicago's *CeaseFire* program upon which *Safe Streets* is modeled. In that study, researchers examined data from eight communities implementing the program for a minimum of 33 months. The study found consistent evidence that the program led to significant reductions in shootings and dramatic reductions in retaliatory homicides.

The costs of gun violence to Baltimore are substantial. Given the compelling evidence of Chicago's *CeaseFire*'s effectiveness in reducing gun violence, along with the encouraging findings from this interim evaluation of *Safe Streets*, it seems wise to continue the program while looking for ways to increase its effectiveness.

We look forward to continuing our evaluation of *Safe Streets* through 2009 and hope that our research will enhance the City's ability to protect its citizens from gun violence.

Sincerely,



Daniel W. Webster, ScD, MPH
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Principal Investigator for the *Safe Streets* Evaluation
Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence