

# Macon Violence Prevention Strategic Plan

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Strategies for a Safer Macon-Bibb County

A project of the Macon-Bibb County community, led by the Office of the Mayor



December 2021



## LETTER FROM **MAYOR LESTER MILLER**

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**My fellow citizens of Macon-Bibb County:  
Making our community a safer place to live, work, and raise a family has  
been my top priority since before taking office. Based on what you've  
told me the past few years, it is also the top priority for our entire  
community.**

During 2020, like many other cities across the country, Macon-Bibb experienced a substantial increase in violent crime. That's why, immediately upon taking office, we began to address the underlying causes of violent crime with programs like the Brookdale Resource Center, the Blight Fight Campaign, Macon Mental Health Matters, and Clean Streets Matter. We invested in our Code Enforcement Department and enacted ordinances to address vice marts and require security cameras at bars and other stores.

Despite these important initiatives and consistent with national trends during 2021, violent crime in Macon-Bibb continued at an unacceptable rate. With lives literally hanging in the balance, we knew we had to immediately begin doing more.

On June 10, 2021, we launched the Macon Violence Prevention (MVP) program, a comprehensive, community-wide project to combat violent crime in Macon-Bibb County, and we promised to ensure it would be funded. This ongoing, evidence-based program brings together elected officials, community leaders, and representatives from more than 20 agencies, organizations, and departments. They each have committed to being a part of this fully collaborative approach to violent crime prevention.

To encourage broader community engagement, MVP facilitated 14 community meetings and launched an online survey in partnership with

the United States Army and Macon-Bibb Emergency Management Agency. More than 1,800 citizens participated either in person or by completing the survey. On September 28, the information gathered guided the work of the Leadership Team during a day-long leadership planning retreat facilitated by the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

This report includes information from the leadership planning session, along with the input from the community to create a roadmap for Macon Violence Prevention.

As community priorities became clear, the consolidated government has already moved forward to address some immediate needs, including investing in state-of-the-art technology, appropriating \$40 million to retain experienced public safety officers, and continuing our investment in mental health services and blight remediation. We are also providing \$2.5 million to the Community Foundation of Central Georgia to support evidence-based, community-led initiatives consistent with the MVP goals.

There's no doubt that the solution to violent crime in our community hinges on all of us working together on the same team. This process has proven that the people of Macon-Bibb County are committed to this effort, and I know that, together, we can make our community safer and stronger for generations to come.

# MVP Leadership Team

A team of more than 30 local community leaders and subject matter experts joined together and volunteered their time and talent to lead Macon Violence Prevention (MVP), a project launched by Mayor Lester Miller to address the tragic loss of life in Macon-Bibb County. The dedication and expertise of this team, along with their willingness to work collaboratively and ability to engage the larger community, is integral to the success of this project.



**Lester Miller** - Macon-Bibb County Mayor

**Verda Colvin** - Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia

**David Davis** - Bibb County Sheriff

**Anita Howard** - District Attorney Macon Judicial Circuit

**Leon Jones** - Bibb County Coroner

**Rebecca Grist** - Macon-Bibb Solicitor-General

**Peter Leary** - Interim United States Attorney Middle District of Georgia

**Che' Young** - Judge, Macon Judicial Circuit Juvenile Court

**Dr. Curtis Jones** - Bibb County School District

**Shane Edwards** - Interim Chief, Macon-Bibb Fire Department

**Cindy Adams** - Chief Assistant District Attorney, Macon Judicial Circuit

**Amy Bell** - Office of the Macon-Bibb Circuit Public Defender Juvenile Division

**Henderson Carswell** - Bibb County Sheriff's Office

**Jamie Cassady** - Bibb County School District

**Tammie Collins** - United Way of Central Georgia

**Andrea Cooke** - Macon Mental Health Matters

**Asha Ellen** - Bibb County District Attorney's Office

**Aubrey Evans** - Bibb County District Attorney's Office

**Dr. Henry Ficklin** - Macon-Bibb County Executive Director of Community Affairs

**Tamika Fluker** - Chief Assistant, Macon-Bibb Circuit Public Defender

**Judy Gordon** - Neighborhood Watch

Coordinator, Bibb County Sheriff's Office

**Charla Ivey** - Peyton Anderson Foundation

**Karen Lambert** - Peyton Anderson Foundation

**Pamela Lightsey** - United States Attorney's Office, Middle District of Georgia

**Darius Maynard** - Community Foundation of Central Georgia

**June O'Neal** - Mentors Project of Bibb County

**J.T. Ricketson** - Director, Macon-Bibb County Code Enforcement Department

**Sarah Schanck** - Crisis Line and Safe House of Central Georgia

**Warren Selby** - Macon Regional CrimeStoppers

**Dee Simms** - Crisis Line and Safe House of Central Georgia

**Michael Solis** - United States Attorney's Office, Middle District of Georgia

**Robert Walker** - Recreation Department Director

**Rick Waller** - Circuit Public Defender, Macon-Bibb County

**Brad Wolfe** - Bibb County Sheriff's Office

**Dr. Sundra Woodford** - United Way of Central Georgia

**Brittany Woolfolk** - Office of the Bibb County Solicitor-General

Like other cities across the country, Macon-Bibb County is suffering because of violent crime. On June 10, 2021, Macon-Bibb Mayor Lester Miller launched Macon Violence Prevention (MVP), a broad initiative to bring community leaders together and foster the engagement of the larger community to develop and implement evidence-based solutions to violent crime in our community.

In addition to fostering community engagement to address the root causes of violent crime, Macon-Bibb County took these immediate steps to make the community safer:

- ## CORE PRINCIPLES

MVP embraces four core principles as key to the successful prevention of violent crime:

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- group, intent to improve,  
"spirit" or "ethos"
- philosophy/culture/morals should be  
more minority narratives / PR of  
community in helping community efforts/  
strong efforts to address  
issues of race  
and class  
and way intersection
- Spanish word: "caringness"  
"caringness" = "caringness"  
"caringness" = "caringness"  
"caringness" = "caringness"



## MVP Planning Process

Within 30 days of launch, MVP created an online community survey and began hosting community forums in neighborhoods across Macon-Bibb County. On September 28, the MVP Leadership Team participated in a day-long planning meeting facilitated by the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government. This work provided a firm foundation for the work of the Macon Violence Prevention and is summarized in this report.

### MVP GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Participants identified actionable goals to **reduce violent crime, including gun violence and domestic violence**. These goals address systemic issues contributing to violent crime, including:

- Poverty
- Food insecurity
- Insufficient access to economic opportunity and quality jobs
- Substance abuse
- Homelessness
- Recidivism

### COMMUNITY-LED STRATEGIES

1. Improving Macon's education system from early childhood through adult education
2. Investing in mental health resources and consumer participation
3. Providing more supervised activities for youth
4. Providing support, education, and accountability for parents
5. Providing more resources to intervene in situations involving domestic violence
6. Increasing access to transportation

## Strategies endorsed by participants include:

### LAW ENFORCEMENT-LED STRATEGIES

1. Improving law enforcement-community relations
2. Increasing sheriff's patrols and fully staffing the sheriff's department
3. Implementing offender-focused and place-focused strategies to direct resources where they are most needed
4. Investing in proven technologies to prevent crime and increase offender accountability
5. Investing in Code Enforcement to continue and expand programs to combat blight

Effective prevention of violent crime will require developing, sustaining, and improving partnerships and collaboration among all stakeholders, including faith-based organizations, elected officials, and the broader community.



# Community Engagement

Facilitating collaboration among leaders and engagement of the larger community to identify and implement evidence-based strategies to reduce violence crime are core MVP strategies.



## More than 1,100

people attended 14 community meetings around the county.



## More than 700

people completed online surveys.



## Facebook growth & engagement

(June 2021 - November 2021)

- Grew Facebook audience from 0 to 1,100+ followers
- Reached 36,000 unique people with branded content
- Promoted community meetings on Facebook, generating 488 online RSVPs



## The MVP website received 580 visitors

including 104 visits to the volunteer page surveys.



## Placed 74 MVP and MVP Related News Stories

- Every local media outlet, including The Telegraph, WMAZ, WGXA, WMGT, Qué Pasa, and NotiVisión Georgia
- Top outlets outside of Macon-Bibb, such as The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Georgia Public Broadcasting, and The Valdosta Daily Times.





## Survey Response Summary

To encourage community engagement, Macon Violence Prevention created a webpage and Facebook page, while leveraging digital advertising, earned media, and social media to share opportunities for engagement and encourage public response. As a result, **more than 700 people completed an online survey** facilitated by Macon-Bibb County Emergency Management Agency in partnership with the United States Army.

Question 1: Please rate how serious you feel the level of crime is in your neighborhood.

Very Serious:

38.40% 

Somewhat Serious:

14.77% 

Serious:

14.06% 

Not too Serious:

27.43% 

Not At All Serious:

5.34% 

Question 3: Since you have lived here, would you say the level of law enforcement protection in your community has:

Increased:

3.527% 

Stayed About the Same:


41.83% 

Decreased:


54.56% 

Question 2: Since you have lived here, would you say the level of crime in your neighborhood has:

Increased:

59.49% 

Stayed About the Same:


37.97% 

Decreased:

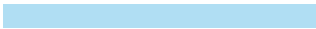
2.53% 

Question 4: Does your community have a neighborhood crime watch program?


Yes:

28.51% 

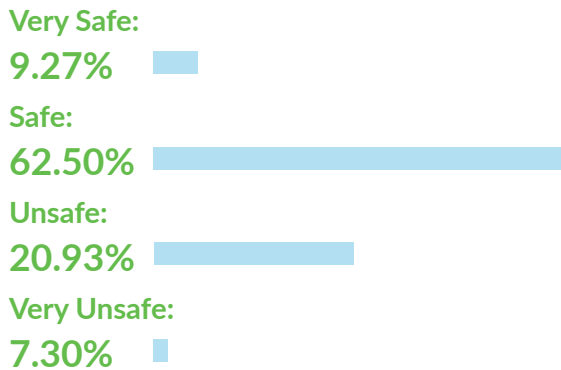
No:

41.29% 

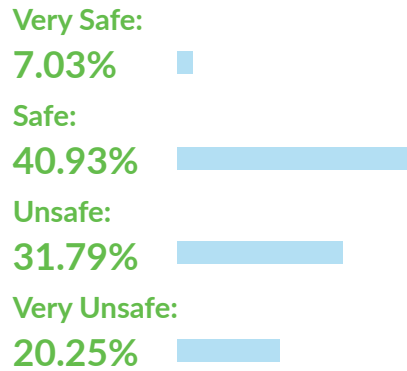
Not Sure:

30.20% 

Question 5: How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?



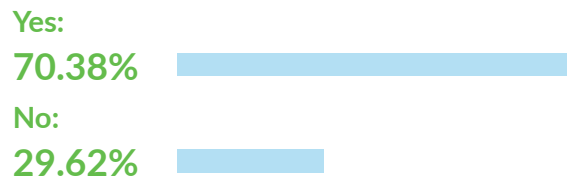
Question 6: How safe do you feel going out at night in your neighborhood?



Question 7: Have you been a victim of crime in your community?

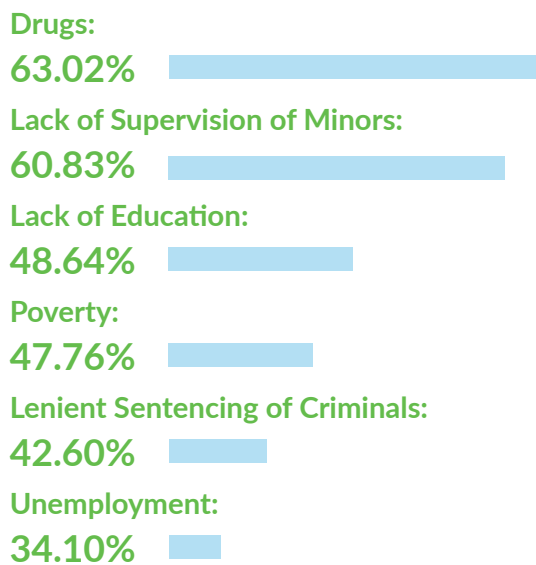


Question 8: Do you know someone who has been a victim of crime in your neighborhood?



Question 9: Please rank what you feel are the most important causes of crime with 1 being least likely to cause crime and 5 being most likely to cause crime:

Ranked from 'most likely' to 'least likely' by weighted average:



Question 10: Do you feel that more crimes in your neighborhood are committed by juveniles or adults, or are they about the same?

Juveniles:

34.23%

Adults:

11.79%

About the Same:

53.98%

Question 11: Please rank the following crime-reducing measures based on how effective you feel each would be with 1 being least effective and 5 being most effective at reducing crime.

Ranked from 'most effective' to 'least effective' by weighted average:

Increasing Sheriff's Office Patrols:

62.66%

Enforced Curfew for Juveniles:

53.05%

Supervised Activities for Juveniles:

51.07%

Stronger Prosecution and Sentencing:

44.84%

Legalizing Drugs:

10.76%



## Macon Violence Prevention Community Meetings

From June 22 to September 23, 2021, MVP hosted 14 forums in neighborhoods across the community in order to hear directly from people on what can be done to address violent crime in Macon. MVP began with a meeting held only for victims of violent crime and their families, and later held specific ones for the faith community and victims of domestic violence. In total, more than 1,100 community members attended the forums and many shared their concerns about violent crime and their ideas on how to fix some of the underlying causes.

## Key Takeaways

The most frequent suggestions and topics of discussion from community members included:

- We must improve Macon's educational system, from early childhood through adult education.
- We must invest in activities and resources for our youth.
- We must use resources where they are most needed, including offender-focused and place-focused strategies for intervention and enforcement.
- We must research and implement proven technology to increase offender accountability and combat violent crime.
- We must invest in Macon's mental health resources.
- We must improve law enforcement-community relations.
- We must continue and expand programs to address blight.

Additional suggestions that came up often included:

- Macon needs strategies to address gun violence.
- We must address recidivism, a major component of violent crime.
- Providing support, education, and accountability for parents is key.
- Poverty, lack of economic opportunity and jobs, and food insecurity are major contributors to violent crime and must be addressed.
- The faith community can be a key partner in effective prevention and intervention.
- We need more comprehensive resources to intervene in situations involving domestic violence.



# Macon Violence Prevention Leadership Team Meeting

Leadership from the key agencies, departments, and organizations tasked with creating an initial plan for Macon Violence Prevention convened on September 28, 2021, at Mercer University. This day-long planning meeting was facilitated by Jennifer Nelson and Nancy Farage of the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

The MVP Leadership Team included individuals who had already been meeting the previous several months. Many present had attended one or more of the 14 MVP community forums, and all had access to the summary report from those meetings and the results of the online survey.

This team identified eighteen strategies to reduce violent crime in Macon-Bibb County.

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## Enhance the education system.

- Provide adequate funding for community-based programs, e.g., basic skills, budgeting.
- Expand community-based sports, entrepreneurship, & additional youth activities.
- Increase the number of youths participating in community-based programs. Add student involvement with multi-disciplinary teams for cross referencing.
- Implement meaningful, collaborative partnerships between the school system, juvenile court, law enforcement, and community partners.
- Provide affordable before and after-school tutoring programs.

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## Enhance youth activities and resources.

- Involve students in restorative practices, e.g., surveys, focus groups.
- Explore best practices for parent/caregiver engagement.
- Revisit policies that create barriers for caregiver engagement.



## Expand mental health resources and increase consumer participation.

- Create a marketing campaign to address mental health awareness, e.g., social media, geo-fencing, billboards, PSAs. Define how to measure effectiveness.
- Increase the number of individuals who have access to mental services.

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## Enhance law enforcement–community relations.

- Commit to a fully-staffed Sheriff's Office.
- Address salary and compensation to retain experienced officers.
- Provide state-of-the-art training on a routine basis.
- Improve starting pay to incentivize new hires.
- Implement community policing strategies like bike patrol, concentrated patrol, and foot patrol.
- Increase presence in schools with the CHAMPS Program.
- Add additional fire stations and sheriff's precincts in communities.
- Connect neighborhood watch groups.
- Expand the reach of neighborhood watch groups -- publicize quarterly meetings using technology to advertise neighborhood association meetings.
- Provide additional resources to the Gang Task Force.

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## Continue and expand programs to remediate blight.

- Expand the Blight Fight initiative to remove more dangerous structures from neighborhoods.
- Implement blight tax initiative.
- Identify ordinances that need language changes.
- Continue code enforcement. Do not close a case until it is complete.



## Reduce gun violence.

- Implement focused deterrence to prevent violent crime.
  - Implement place-based and offender-based targeted enforcement.
  - Place more cameras strategically where large crowd events or gatherings occur.
  - Implement proactive patrol programs.
  - Evaluate the effectiveness of gun buy-back programs.
  - Partner with the Bibb County Board of Education and Gang Unit in schools.
  - Provide additional resources to the Gang Unit.
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## Reduce Recidivism.

- Support the establishment of a holistic reentry case management program.
    - Continuing education, adult literacy resource development, and career counseling.
  - Create a juvenile offender reentry program.
    - School entry and transition, mentorship.
    - Support culturally-specific needs of foster youth.
  - Create speakers bureau/advisory board subject matter experts (lived experience), support feedback loops and mentorship.
  - Enhance record restriction programs.
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## Strengthen parent education and accountability.

- Enhance accountability programs through the juvenile justice system.
- Identify and implement a safety net program for caregivers and families.
- Create zone-based interventions focused on implementing safety-net strategies and supporting whole families.
- Create an aggressive multi-agency social media campaign.
- Create young parent support groups.
- Facilitate engagement in school around mediators and mental health.
- Provide baseline parenting enhancement.





### Reduce poverty.

- Improve opportunities for financial stability and freedom.
- Develop working definitions of poverty that open doors instead of closing them.
- Enhance workforce and job skill development.
- Develop strategies on community-based programming on financial topics.
- Fund a community resource navigator to support local nonprofits.
- Develop more neighborhood business incubators.

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### Reduce lack of economic opportunity.

- Invest in job training and certificate programs to expand opportunities for employment.
- Incentivize local businesses to provide internship opportunities for work experience and on-job training.
- Improve access to public transportation, e.g., bus routes/hours.

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### Reduce food insecurity.

- Improve access to public transportation.
- Utilize local faith-based organizations as hosts for job fairs and farmers markets.
- Provide resources to encourage development of community gardens in food deserts.

## Engage Faith Community.

- Use momentum from International Day of Prayer to focus local faith-based organizations on specific community needs.
  - Utilize local faith-based organizations as hosts for job fairs (also under goal 10), farmer's markets, and general information.
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## Reduce domestic violence.

- Provide funding for the Family Justice Center.
    - Investigators
    - Victim advocates
    - Attorneys
  - Provide funding for law enforcement training.
    - Work with victims and suspects for better resolutions.
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## Increase access to transportation.

- Expand Macon Transit Authority routes and coverage.
  - Provide funding to provide transportation for victims of violent crime.
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## Increase community engagement.

- Provide community education regarding violent crime prevention.
- Utilize churches and community groups known to residents.
- Provide access to resources and to the criminal justice system.
- Provide funding for quarterly contact through MVP (town halls, newsletter, etc.).



## Develop, sustain, and improve partnerships and collaboration amongst stakeholders.

- Hold quarterly update meetings that include resource mapping and strategy retooling.
  - Identify and utilize existing collaboratives/coalitions.
  - Develop new partnerships/collaboratives with relevant stakeholders – government and non-government.
- 

## Reduce/prevent homelessness.

- Partner with the Macon Coalition to End Homelessness.
  - Identify the hidden homeless and chronically homeless and mentally ill homeless and develop ways to reach them/provide services.
  - Ensure the community is aware of services through the McKinney-Vento Act.
  - Develop affordable housing.
  - Educate the community about resources related to housing/homelessness.
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## Reduce and prevent substance abuse.

- Address substance abuse as a public health issue.
- Educate youth with consistent messaging.
- Partner with NCHD Opioid Abuse Prevention Program.
- Create a public relations campaign to help change the language/mindset around substance abuse.
- Provide a pathway to self-reporting and treatment (not a referral).
- Educate the community regarding that pathway via PSAs, Facebook ads, etc.
- 63% of survey respondents said drugs were most likely to cause crime.
- 60% of survey respondents said legalizing drugs would not be effective at reducing crime.



## A LOOK AHEAD

The work completed by the Macon Violence Prevention Leadership Team is just the first of many steps in the process of bringing stakeholders together from every part of Macon-Bibb County to take action to reduce violent crime. Going forward, MVP will continue to marshal the resources and talent of our community, learn from best practices in other jurisdictions, and develop and implement effective solutions to reduce violent crime for Macon-Bibb County.

The success of the MVP program will depend upon continued full collaboration among partners and a commitment to continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of each aspect of the program. These leaders have committed to fully engage with this ongoing project and to use their influence and resources to encourage the engagement of the larger community. By aligning the agenda of our local government with our community's culture of planning while more fully engaging the public in this ongoing work, Macon Violence Prevention can meet the challenge to create a safer community.

