

## Missing the Point – Mayor Scott’s Anti-Crime Program

Wednesday, January 18, 2023



Brandon M. Scott ✓  
@MayorBMScott

...

In Jan. 2022, my administration launched Baltimore’s Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS) pilot in the Western Police District. Since the start of this pilot, we have seen homicides and nonfatal shootings in the Western District drop by a combined 34%



A screenshot of a tweet – including the police car – from Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott, time-dated 1:41 PM January 6, 2023.

As you can see from its caption, the featured image for this op/ed is a screenshot of a tweet from Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott touting the success of the pilot program for his [Group Violence Reduction Strategy](#), “GVRS” for short. It’s about gun violence by which he means homicides, most of which involve guns, and shootings whereby people are shot, but don’t die.

The GVSR program – which, when it comes to “active ingredients,” is primarily a police initiative – is itself a subset of the Mayor’s [“Baltimore City Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan](#), Effective: July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2026.” Note that the end date for the plan is well-into Mayor Scott’s second term for which he will not even be running until 2024 and, in fact, reads like an elaborately produced campaign position paper. In short, the Plan is a community relations-intensive police action. It’s long on rhetoric, very short on facts and generally oblivious to the reality of the situation.

I have a problem... No. More to the point, the people of Baltimore have a problem with the Mayor's tweet. I'm not saying that the Mayor doesn't mean well, but only that he's clueless.

The Mayor's pilot program focused on homicides and shootings in the Western District which is one of the most troubled areas in the city. Baltimore is divided into [nine police districts](#). In 2020, the last full calendar year prior to the onset of the Mayor's "Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan" in July 2021, there were 335 homicides and 720 shootings citywide. Combined total... 1,055. Here, in the table below, are summary statistics for the city's nine Police Districts from Police Department/[Open Baltimore](#) data.

2020, 2021 and 2022 Homicides and Non-Fatal Shootings in Baltimore's Nine Police Districts							
		Homicides	Non-Fatal Shootings	Total 2020	Total 2021	Total 2022	Formula... -(2021-2022)/2021 Pct. Change
1	Central	16	58	74	111	83	-25.23%
2	Eastern	45	115	160	164	166	1.22%
3	Northeast	39	72	111	75	130	73.33%
4	Northern	23	55	78	53	45	-15.09%
5	Northwest	43	80	123	120	129	7.50%
6	Southeast	21	52	73	94	84	-10.64%
7	Southern	40	69	109	138	143	3.62%
8	Southwest	58	122	180	139	127	-8.63%
9	<b>Western</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>-33.93%</b>
	<b>All Districts</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>720</b>	<b>1,055</b>	<b>1,062</b>	<b>1,018</b>	<b>-4.14%</b>
Compiled from Open Baltimore data, downloaded Wednesday, January 11, 2023 <a href="https://data.baltimorecity.gov/datasets/baltimore::part-1-crime-data/">https://data.baltimorecity.gov/datasets/baltimore::part-1-crime-data/</a>							

In 2021, Homicides and non-fatal shootings in the Western District totaled 168, then 111 in 2022 down 34%. These numbers support the claim the Mayor makes in his tweet, but let's look at the data – *for all nine Police Districts* – from a less politically prejudiced point of view.

The pilot program is alleged to have reduced total homicides and shootings by 34% in the Western District, but did some of those crimes simply go elsewhere to other police districts? Between 2021 and 2022, gun-related crime in the Western District fell by 57 incidents, ostensibly due to the Mayor's program, reducing total gun-related crimes citywide by 4.14%. Unfortunately, the total citywide reduction in gun-related crime resulting from 57 fewer incidents in the Western District should have been 5.37%.

I know it's a bit tedious, but think about the math... 5.37% is 57 fewer gun-related crimes in the Western District divided by 1,062 total gun-related crimes in 2021. The point is that implementation of the Mayor's program in the Western District appears to have driven at least some gun-related Western District violence elsewhere, to other police districts where the pilot program wasn't in effect.

While the Mayor was focused on reducing gun violence via his pilot program in the Western District, gun-related crime was rising in the Eastern, Northeast – up a whopping 73.33% – Northwest and Southern Districts. At the same time, homicides and shootings were actually falling in the Central, Northern, Southeast and Southwest Districts where the Mayor’s program wasn’t in effect.

In fact, we really don’t know what the Mayor’s pilot program accomplished, do we? Because his experiment has no “control.” There’s no way of knowing how many homicides and non-fatal shootings would have occurred in the Western District without the Mayor’s program. The Mayor can claim what he wants, but has no way to prove his point.

To be fair, we can probably all agree that putting enough, highly visible police on every corner in Baltimore will have the beneficial effect of reducing gun-related violence. But that would effectively make Baltimore a police state, wouldn’t it? The Mayor’s problem is that he just doesn’t get it. The Police and criminal courts can discourage violent crime, even reduce it by incarcerating the individuals who are causing it. But there will be more like these perpetrators coming, won’t there? Because the Police, however effective and valiant their efforts, don’t address the root economic and social causes of violent crime.

On page 10 of the Mayor’s 33 page manifesto, “[Baltimore City Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan](#),” in the introduction for his “Strategy” section, Mayor Scott said the following...

## **1. GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION**

The record levels of gun violence in our communities are the primary barrier to sustainably addressing Baltimore’s most pressing inequities – joblessness, homelessness, poor education and health – as we build broad systems to address all social determinants of health affecting Baltimore residents.

By the word “health” in the last line, the Mayor is treating crime – all of it, not just homicides and shootings – as a public health issue which is one of the major themes of his plan. That’s interesting, but off point.

Notice the flow of his logic... Gun violence, he tells us, is what’s preventing him from “addressing Baltimore’s most pressing inequalities – joblessness, homelessness, poor education and health.” No, Mr. Mayor. You’ve completely missed the point. It’s joblessness – persistent, transgenerational un- and under-employment – and poor education that are the root causes of the violence you are trying to combat. Not the other way around.

No. Violent crime a problem alright, but it’s a symptom of a much more profound civic disorder, by which I am referring to the seriously dysfunctional economy in which the majority of city residents are trapped. Where does Mayor Scott think the people who cause crime come from? Does he think they’re just inherently bad people? Of course not. It’s a complex question that he can’t answer. And, if he can’t tell you why people commit crimes, he’ll never be able to accomplish a sustainable reduction in crime rates – short of turning the city into a police state which, not incidentally, is not a solution for anything. At best, it’s an emergency measure that can actually do more harm than good – and misses the point completely as to the root causes of crime.

Fix the economy. Crime is not the city’s biggest problem. It’s certainly an awful, horrific aspect of life in Baltimore. But crime, per se, is not the most important problem for the two-thirds of the city’s families that struggle every day to get by. It’s a problem alright, but what’s causing this abhorrent, persistent violence is far more profound and insidious. To quote James Carville, said under very different circumstances, “It’s the economy, stupid!”

Develop the entire city with thoughtful jobs creation that benefits everyone, not just the few who contribute to Mayoral campaigns. Watch what happens. Understand that the effort may take a decade or even a generation to accomplish, well beyond the term of any specific city administration, but it will work. All-inclusive, citywide economic development will remove the underlying causes of crime – and violence will cease to be a reasonable career and personal choice for far too many of the city’s disadvantaged residents.

-Les Cohen

Les Cohen is a long-term Marylander, having grown up in Annapolis. Professionally, he writes and edits materials for business and political clients from his base of operations in Columbia, Maryland. He has a Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Economics. Leave a comment or feel free to send him an email to [Les@Writeaway.us](mailto:Les@Writeaway.us).

