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Headline: In a dominant vote, here's how Cincinnati City Council's new partnership could reduce firearm offenses in Cincinnati.

Throughout America, navigating gun violence has been one of the most pressing issues to date. Here in Cincinnati, the issue isn't any less discussed. While there are plenty of people within the community bargaining a number of opinions on the matter, progress is a step that must be made with action. This past October, the Cincinnati City Council took an 8-1 majority vote which is set to welcome funding for the Advance Peace Project.

The program, founded in 2010, was developed after the then director of Richmond, California's Office of Neighborhood Security Devone Boggan was made aware of a concerning analysis. Less than 30 men in Richmond made up for 70% of the city's gun crime in 2009. Boggan's services selected a number of those men most likely to be involved in shootings and instead provided them with a monthly check of \$1,000 in return for staying out of trouble. Richmond, which then ranked among one of the top 12 most dangerous cities in America has since seen an 85% reduction in firearm assaults along with a 65% decrease in firearm homicides as of 2022.

So how did the program make its way to the queen city? Well, in April of 2023, Boggan found himself in Cincinnati. "I'm not here to sell Advance Peace," Boggan said during a conference with city council members. "I'm here to provide as an informed practitioner considerations that must be taken into account when building a Cincinnati ecosystem to reduce gunfire." The pitch drew support from members such as Vice Mayor Jan -Michele Lemon Kearney and fellow council member Meeka Owens. "Devone (Boggan) came into our

community at the right time,” Owens said. “We’ve seen progress over the last year in terms of firearm usage but we can’t just will a problem away.”

The city council’s 8-1 vote in October granted an additional \$275,000 towards the program which was announced shortly after three minors were shot within a week of each other. One of the incidents included a 5-year-old boy who was fatally shot in a drive-by. “The most important thing we as council members can do each day is hold ourselves accountable,” Owens said. “The tragedy that families in our community face seeing loved ones, especially our children taken by guns, is inexcusable. It’s going to take more than just one solution to see a total change.”

Instead of singling out offenders and further criminalizing impacted areas, Advance Peace provides active firearm offenders with financial opportunities to access professional training, therapy, job opportunities, and more. Since its installment, the program has been adopted by 11 other cities which includes Lansing, Michigan who saw a 65% decrease in gun crime since its welcoming in 2022. “At our level as far as what we’re able to accomplish, this is a great opportunity for us to make strides in our community,” said fellow city council member Anna Albi. In June, the Cincinnati Police Department reported a 4.2% drop in shooting accounts compared to last year and a 8.9% decrease in relation to 2022.

The funds, as discussed during both October and November’s city council meetings, are expected to be gathered from the city’s contingency operation fund which is oversought by the Cincinnati Works. In efforts to break the cycle, Owens and fellow city council members hope the additional funding will limit the number of guns passed around in the community. “There are other options out there,” Owens said. “We’re not just throwing money out to ignore the issue, we’re allowing prior offenders to envision better for themselves.”

The program is designed for participants to remain anonymous if preferred. Operating separately from the CPD, anonymity allows participants to build relationships with members of the community who hold no affiliation to local police. As of the 1st of December, public records show 276 shootings incidents have been recorded since the start of the year which is projected to finish below last year's 313 incidents. Importantly, records displayed that in the midst of October's key 8-1 vote, a tally of 36 shootings were recorded in the area which marked the highest totals of the year.

"One of the hardest parts about gun violence is that it's so unpredictable," Owens said. "I think a large part of where we'd like to see the Advance Peace play a part in our community is putting an end to the unpredictability we face month in and month out." As data regarding the city's addition will continue to pour out over the next couple years, Cincinnati City Council hopes the Advance Peace will be a step in the right direction.

Sample Tweet: Over a year since Cincinnati welcomed the Advance Peace Project, the Cincinnati City Council's pledge of \$275,000 is the next step towards giving local firearm offenders a second chance to make an impact.

Sources:

Meeka Owens: 513-352-3466 - zoom meeting

Anna Albi: 513-352-5280 - in person

Devone Boggan: quotes obtained from April 2023 Cincinnati City Council meeting

<https://insights.cincinnati-oh.gov/stories/s/Reported-Shootings/xw7t-5phj/>

<https://www.advancepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AP-Richmond-Impact-2019.pdf>

<https://www.advancepeace.org/about/the-solution/>