

The 2021 Brave Behind the Bullet Initiative

Goal: The *2021 Brave Behind the Bullet* peace and conflict resolution initiative seeks to help develop allocated psychological resources and legal advocacy support for African American Mothers whose children were homicide victims of gun violence in Washington, DC and Baltimore City. This initiative will ensure that these goals are achieved by providing black mothers who lost a child to gun violence with complimentary legal advocacy support in preparation for public court hearings, free virtual therapy sessions offered by licensed clinicians, and privileged online access to community gun violence healing symposiums in the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area. The *2021 Brave Behind the Bullet initiative* will work in collaboration with Washington DC's Office of Attorney General's implemented *Cure the Streets* task force, the *That's A Plug* incorporated nation's capital community collective, and Baltimore City-State Attorney General's affiliated *Survivors Against Violence Everywhere* organization to offer empowering and restorative gun violence re-directive interventions. This initiative will utilize grief counselors, pro bono attorneys, and trauma informed professionals to mitigate the psychological distress that black mothers endure upon losing a child to gun violence while residing in an under-resourced community. Therefore, the ultimate goal of the *2021 Brave Behind the Bullet initiative* is to provide psychological equity, social wellness, and justice to communities in which black mothers have disproportionately lost children to police and civilian gun violence in the Baltimore-Washington region. The expected outcomes of the *2021 Brave Behind Bullet Initiative* will include (1) two cohorts of 5-10 black mothers receiving virtual weekly therapeutic services provided by licensed therapists for up to 1 month and (2) an assembly of black mothers attending virtual monthly judicial public hearings to give legal testimonies from May 2021 to July 2021 in front of Washington DC and Baltimore City councilmembers.

Background: The foundation of the *2021 Brave Behind the Bullet* initiative originated from my 2020-2021 honors thesis titled *Understanding Black Mothers Who Lost A Child to Gun Violence*. As a lead principal research investigator of this honors thesis, I successfully formulated a descriptive research study empowering Black Mothers who lost a child to gun violence throughout Washington DC and Baltimore City. While formulating this research I received Georgetown University's institutional review board's documented approval and as a targeted assessment this project works to document the personal experiences of grief, resilience, and post-traumatic growth that Black Mothers in the Baltimore-Washington area who lost a child to gun violence endure. Currently, the goal of this research initiative is to help inform the development of a community-centered intervention that will provide Black Mothers in these areas whose children have been victims to gun violence with complementary services provided by social workers, grief counselors, psychologists, and trauma specialists. By expanding upon this foundation of research, I aspire to provide black mothers who lost a child to gun violence with access to psychological services and legal advocacy support throughout the process of coping with loss and while approaching public bill hearing testimonies.

The *2021 Brave Behind the Bullet's* specific focus on the political inclusion of black mothers seeks to create an environment in which baltimore-washington metropolitan council members and black mothers who lost a child to gun violence can establish common goals and work towards agreed upon legal solutions. This restorative initiative intends to address the underlying systemic factors of community violence and police brutality that are associated with the disproportionate rates of Black mothers who lost a child to gun violence. To reduce the adverse effects of losing a child to gun violence this initiative will foreground and center grieving black mothers demands for political proposals, restitution, and coping healthcare services. The *2021 Brave Behind the Bullet* initiative will contribute to peace in the Baltimore-Washington area through offering restitution-based services to black mothers who lost children to gun violence utilizing restorative funded legal solutions and mental health interventions. The *2021 Brave Behind the Bullet initiative* will be grounded on creating equity in Washington DC and Baltimore City for black mothers who lost a child to gun violence using political initiations and rehabilitative services. Furthermore, given that throughout my efforts of grounding this research that I have been nominated as a principal representative and executive student board member of Georgetown University's Gender Justice and Diversity nominated task force, I plan to present my peace work outcomes to the Attorney General's Office of both Washington DC and Baltimore City to be considered as a federally funded violence interruption legal diversion strategy.

Theory of Change: The *2021 Brave Behind the Bullet initiative* will be grounded on the alternative dispute resolution theory of change. The alternative dispute framework is a conflict resolution model which posits that two parties can settle disputes outside of a courtroom and craft socially innovative agreed upon solutions. Three main features of the alternative dispute resolution model are facilitated dialogues, settlement conferences, and community resolution programs. The facilitated dialogue aspect of

this framework is a process by which both black mothers who lost a child to gun violence and local council members present their desired outcomes to resolve the overwhelming rates of black homicide victims. The settlement conference feature of this theory would allow black mothers and councilmembers in the Baltimore-Washington area to discuss the specifications of the deliverable outcomes and settlement agreements that will be offered to this population of black mothers that have experienced loss. Lastly, the community resolution program facet of this theory will provide a continuation of free legal services from public speech assistants and mediators provided by the *Survivors Against Violence Everywhere* nonprofit organization to assist black mothers who lost a child to gun violence in their pursuit in resolving disputes with government officials. The application of the alternative dispute resolution applied framework will be effective in transforming conflict and enhancing peace in the Baltimore-Washington area for black mothers who lost a child to gun violence given that this model will center the voices of populations that have experienced harm and empower them to inspire change. As a result, this process can create common goals between citizens alongside government officials and institute re-imaginative restorative possibilities for change.

Objective: The *2021 Brave Behind the Bullet Initiative* will work in collaboration with both the *Cure the Streets* task force organization and *That's a Plug* community platform to fulfill the specific objectives of providing black mothers who lost a child to gun violence with access to free therapeutic services and coping with gun violence healing symposiums. As a targeted peace intervention, *Cure the Streets* outreach workers project will refer black mothers and families throughout the Greater Baltimore-Washington area that are coping with losing a child to gun violence to licensed clinicians, grief counselors, and trauma specialists who will offer weekly psychotherapy sessions and brief in-take consultations. Given that this initiative looks to provide grieving black mothers with weekly free virtual therapy sessions and access to online community healing symposiums, black mothers that are the recipients of this initiative will be offered the necessary technological devices such as computer tablets and Wi-Fi connectivity access. In addition, in order to ensure that black mothers who are participating in the *Brave Behind the Bullet Initiative* are benefiting from the technological and psychological resources that are being offered each participant will be provided with a monthly feedback survey describing their level of satisfaction and progression throughout months of May 2021 to July 2021.

The *That's a Plug* non-profit community platform will further contribute to the *Brave Behind the Bullet's* objective by providing black mothers with violence alternative exercises using trauma sensitive yoga sessions and monthly coping with gun violence symposiums offered by mental health professionals during the months of June 2021 and July 2021. Through creating a community of black mothers that are concerned with healing solutions, this initiative will expand its partnership-network by working with Baltimore City's *Survivors Against Violence Everywhere* organization (S.A.V.E). The S.A.V.E organization will offer black mothers who lost a child to gun violence free public narrative speaking services that will be provided by public speech coaches to help mothers give testimonies on local bills, political acts, and amendments in the Baltimore-Washington region. Furthermore, considering that the S.A.V.E organization and the *Cure Streets* task force both has affiliations with the Attorney General's office located in Baltimore and Washington DC the *2021 Brave Behind the Bullet initiative* will rely on pro bono legal assistance offered by attorneys who will help black mothers who lost a child to gun violence that decide to give legal testimonies with court testification sign-up procedures, victim impact statements, and effective public hearing document preparation modules. The judicial access outlets and free therapy resources that are intentionally offered in this initiative ultimately serve as fortified meaningful solutions to address resource absence and state-sanctioned violence that are associated with the disproportionate rates of Black mothers who lost a child to gun violence.

Conclusion: In closing, the *2021 Brave Behind the Bullet's* platform seeks to inform legal justice systems use of alternative psychological and judicial resources to address gun violence exposure and black mothers' familial experiences with homicide. The intersectional application of the *2021 Brave Behind the Bullet's* program aims to encourage local municipalities to use race-gender empowering tactics to provide black mothers who lost a child to gun violence with comprehensive psychological equity and judicial representation, with the ultimate goal of replicating this model in inner cities across the nation.