



My Brother's Keeper Task Force Project Coordinator

Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been steady progress made towards closing the achievement and opportunity gaps by increasing high school graduations rates, decreasing crime rates and ensuring all Bridgeport children have access to quality pre-k. However, Bridgeport's youth still lag significantly among their peers and boys and young men of color are the most at-risk. Mayor Finch recognized that more has to be done to ensure all young people and especially Black and Latino young males are successful.

In October 2014, Mayor Bill Finch and Congressman Jim Himes joined by community leaders and stake-holders announced Bridgeport has accepted President Barack Obama's challenge to become a My Brother's Keeper Community. All six of the milestones in the White House's MBK initiative are being addressed by existing efforts. Of the six, Mayor Finch put special emphasis on two of the initiative's milestones: (1) Ensure all children enter school cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally ready and (2) Ensuring all youth remain safe from violent crime and are provided a second chance. The purpose of this proposal is to seek financial support for the latter goal.

The Challenge

Although Bridgeport crime rates for both adults and juveniles are falling, young people still report high rates of violence exposure, fear of violence and perpetration of violence. Additionally, many young people, who have gone either through the juvenile justice system or prison, struggle to turn their lives around. The second part of this initiative is to give young people with a record a second chance and an opportunity to rejoin the community in a productive and healthy manner.

Rationale

The milestones chosen have potential impact and ability for the city and its partners to effect change. Ensuring all youth remain safe from violent crime and are provided a second chance effects all other milestones. For example, having a safe environment can hurt academic achievement in our schools, prevent focus on post-secondary opportunities, and deter business and job growth. Preventing violence and enabling youth to have a second chance to re-engage the community as a productive, valued member of society will culturally and systemically change Bridgeport.

City of Bridgeport's Plan

Young men of color face many challenges and remain underserved because of a host of additional issues that hinder their success. These issues must be addressed to change the fabric and results of their experiences.

The Mayor's Office commissioned the Bridgeport Department of Health and Social Services to convene a broad group of stakeholders to have a discussion on youth violence. Additionally, a series of community conversations were held with key stakeholders and youth groups to learn

City Of Bridgeport



Mayor Bill Finch

and hear firsthand the perspective from practitioners, policy makers and youth. This process was the impetus in planning the *My Brother's Keeper- Bridgeport report* and highlighted youth violence as a priority concern in the city.

During these meetings, it was discovered that although Bridgeport has a myriad of programs working to help support the city's youth, no one organization is addressing problems young men of color face within a cultural to structural lens. It is clear that no "easy" button can be pressed to solve the challenges facing young men of color. This is not a problem that can be fixed by government alone, but must also involve the state, city, school district, colleges and universities, and community organizations on every level.

Next Steps

This proposal seeks to create a project coordinator position for the My Brother's Keeper Task Force. The project coordinator will facilitate the task force to identify best practices, programs and policies that support young men of color and to identify underpinning markers that help the group understand how to generate results.

With supportive funds from CSSD and the City of Bridgeport, the city would like to hire a coordinator to manage the task force with suggested responsibilities to include: planning, implementing, and evaluating activities associated with the task force to include providing: general oversight for task force activities and associated projects and reporting. The project coordinator will work to develop and implement strategies that will lead to long-term involvement with the broader community on issues that impact young men of color in the city of Bridgeport.