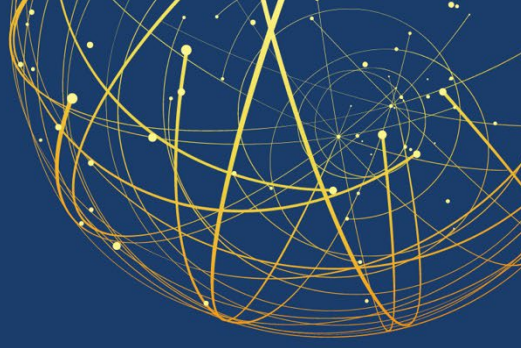

AMOVING FORWARD: A BLUEPRINT FOR GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Jonathan Capehart 00:00

Okay, are we all here? We are all here. Thank you all very much for coming. Thank you to all the panelists—who are here. Frank Blackwell, Mayor Andre Dickens, 61st Mayor of Atlanta, Angela Ferrell-Zabala, executive director, Moms Demand Action, Jens Ludwig, professor at the University of Chicago, and Oscar-winning documentarian, Joshua Seftel, director of *All the Empty Rooms* and founder of Smartypants Pictures. I'm Jonathan Capehart, co-host of The Weekend on MS NOW, and if you pay attention to the news, you know that a week ago last Saturday, I was among the 2,000 people in the ballroom of the Washington Hilton when a gunman tried to make his way to the ballroom. It was my first time ever being in a potential mass shooting incident, my first time ever being in a shooting incident, and I bring that up because even though that was my first time, I instinctively knew what to do—Drop to the floor, seek shelter under the table. And I know that because, one, as a nation, we have seen the videos, we have heard the audio, the 911 tapes. As a reporter, I've covered them from afar. And so, I think at this point, just from my own experience, I think we as a nation have learned sort of intuitively how to deal with this, the scourge of gun violence. But my experience is nowhere near as painful as the experience that you've been through, Mr. Blackwell. Your son, Dominic—

Frank Blackwell 02:07

—Yes—

Jonathan Capehart 02:08

—was killed in gun violence, and I want people to get a sense of your son, Dominic, through Joshua's film, *All the Empty Rooms*. If we have that video, could we play that?

[Video Plays]

Jonathan Capehart 05:26

Mr. Blackwell, one, tell us about Dominic that we didn't get to see through that clip, and also, how does it feel to, one, see this clip, but to have Dominic out in the world in this way?

Frank Blackwell 05:55

Yeah, as you can tell from his room, he's a 14-year-old boy, just loud and crazy. He was definitely the loudest one in our house, always getting us all together and just doing things to make—to make all of us laugh. And then you find out later that he was the same exact way at school. Just wanted to make his friends laugh and be just that crazy kid. SpongeBob stuff everywhere.

Jonathan Capehart 06:23

I noticed that. Everywhere.

Frank Blackwell 06:25

Yeah.

Jonathan Capehart 06:25

Not just the bed, but on the bookshelves—everywhere.

Frank Blackwell 06:28

Yeah. And that chair that's in there, he got really excited because my wife found this SpongeBob armchair that we could put in his room, and it's just everything that he could want. There was SpongeBob, and we'd try to get it for him. And all of our friends and family members and everything, they still continue that on—with SpongeBob shirts and underwear and socks and tattoos and everything that they can get.

Jonathan Capehart 06:55

Okay. Sorry, not to go down a little rabbit hole here, but what was it about SpongeBob that Dominic loved so much? Was it something about his character or just the colors or?

Frank Blackwell 07:05

Yeah, I think he was just loud and crazy like him. They even had the same laugh, it seemed like sometimes ... when he was being silly. Which makes it even more difficult because after he was murdered and all of the people left and the house got quiet, we could definitely tell that we're missing someone because the house was just so quiet without him. We could hear him up in his room, just doing things and making noise and being loud. And just to not have that anymore was probably the first thing that we noticed that we didn't hear his loud, crazy laugh.

Jonathan Capehart 07:47

Did I hear that you fear that you'll forget what Dominic's voice sounds like? Can I—

Frank Blackwell 07:59

—Yeah. And it's the smell, and it's the voice, and even so from now, if his friends will find a video, they'll send it to us, and we definitely forget about what their voice sounds like. It's been over six years since we got to talk to him, and so you definitely start to lose touch of what his voice sounded like. And then when you hear it in a video, it's good or it's sad that we see these videos of him because that's all we get is just replays. But it's also good because then I can remember what he sounded like.

Jonathan Capehart 08:46

As a result of Dominic's murder six years ago, you've joined a club you did not want to be a part of. What have you learned about yourself, your family, or the other families you have met in this time who've also lost loved ones due to gun violence?

Frank Blackwell 09:16

We just want to keep Dominic relevant. And I've talked to a few people here, Mia, and everything as well. The fact that everyone is here to see Dominic, and the fact that everyone's going to the screenings to see the documentary. Dominic got to be on Netflix and all of that, he'd be going crazy. He'd be so excited that everyone is like, "Yeah, those guys are here for me."

Jonathan Capehart 09:44

Well, since you invoked Netflix, Netflix is where I also got to see Joshua's movie, *All the Empty Rooms*. It's a short documentary. It's only about 35 minutes long, Joshua, but it packs a very powerful punch in two ways to my mind. One, as we saw in the clip of Dominic's room, for a minute there, I wonder if other

people wondered, "Is the sound on? Is anything happening?" And that's part of it. The silence is part of the journey in your documentary. And the other thing is, and I think you mentioned this on our call, that the word gun is not used anywhere in the documentary. Talk about the reason for that, but also the power of these empty rooms. Where did it come from, this idea? And why you felt compelled to turn what Steve Hartman was doing, the CBS News journalist, into a very powerful 35-minute film that just won the Oscar.

Joshua Seftel 11:10

Well, yes, thank you. So, the way that started was Steve Hartman from CBS, he called me, and he told me about the project he was doing. And he said that he'd written a letter, a real letter in a FedEx envelope to every family who had lost a child since Sandy Hook to a school shooting. And he said, "I want to come to your house with a photographer and take pictures of your child's empty bedroom." And he showed me a photograph that he had taken from one of the rooms, and it was a picture of a toothpaste tube with a cap left off. And I immediately understood what this was and what it could be because I felt the presence and the absence of the child just from that one photo of this toothpaste tube with the cap off. You could picture the child rushing to get ready for school, leaving the cap off, saying, "I'll put that on later when I get home," and then never coming home. And the idea that there are rooms like this all over the country that are frozen in time, stuck in amber, was something that I just immediately said, "I think we could make a documentary."

Jonathan Capehart 12:32

On that point, Joshua, sorry to cut you off, because “All the Empty Rooms.” My mind, empty means empty. Cleared out, empty. And instead, what we see in the film is that those rooms are not empty.

Joshua Seftel 12:48

That's right.

Jonathan Capehart 12:49

That's right. The emptiness comes from the loss—of the child.

Joshua Seftel 12:53

Yeah. Each room is a story. Each room is a child's life lived. And you can, even from just seeing Dominic's room for—a few seconds, you could learn about him, you could understand who he is. Every time the photographer lines up a frame and hits the shutter, it reveals another clue about who this child was—and that was what we were trying to do, and to me, and I think to Steve Hartman, the issue is that we've

become numb—That there's over 100 school shootings a year now. So, that's more than two a week, and we can't even keep up with it or process it anymore. And so, we've become numb, and we were thinking, how do we find a way to make people feel and reconnect with this issue? Because until we do that, I don't think change can happen as quickly.

Jonathan Capehart 13:55

We opened with a clip from showing you from the documentary of Dominic's room. I do want to play the trailer. It's not that long. It's a couple minutes long. So, you can get a feel for *All the Empty Rooms* that Steve Hartman went into. That's what we call a tease. There we go. Oh. Well, that's the—Okay. Here we go.

[Video Plays]

Jonathan Capehart 16:28

Joshua, can you tell, quickly, the story of someone who was, I think it was someone who was working on the documentary. The one who showed up in the T-shirt.

Joshua Seftel 16:40

Oh, okay.

Jonathan Capehart 16:40

That story.

Joshua Seftel 16:40

Sure. So, along the way, we tried to gauge the impact that this film could have, and one story that happened was we took the photographs from the film and we had a photo exhibit, and it was at a film festival in New York State. And the man who was setting up the photographs, we found out was quite conservative and had a certain position on guns. And he was known to wear a T-shirt that said, "Guns aren't stupid, people are." Anyway, this is the guy who's hanging up these photographs that you've seen now, and halfway through the day of hanging the photos, he went up to his boss and he said, "I need to go home. I can't do this anymore. I'm sorry." And he left. And the next day when he came back in, he came up to his boss and he said, "I just want to tell you that I will never wear that T-shirt again." And that was one

story of many—that we've heard about the power of seeing these rooms—and of understanding the impact, not on a political level, but on a human level. We don't mention the word guns in the film because I felt we didn't need to—We didn't want to bring it back into the debate that we're stuck in. We wanted to take it out of that debate. And show people the impact that it's having on people like Frank and other families all across the country.

Jonathan Capehart 18:28

Now, Angela, at Moms Demand Action, I'm just curious, how has your advocacy changed as we have moved from one mass shooting, horrific gun violence incident after another over all these years?

Angela Ferrell-Zabala 18:51

Thank you for that. First and foremost, I just want to thank you, Frank, for being here and sharing this story, and for you translating that, and just honor and just give voice. You don't have to give voice, but just pay some honor and respect to survivors of gun violence because unfortunately, that's a large portion of this country. And when we define survivors, we define someone who has impacted themselves, or it could've been you've been threatened, you have someone that you know and love dearly has been shot, wounded, or taken by gun violence. I have seen quite a lot of movement in this. And I just want to sit with this idea of frozen in time because the potential there, the potential that we're leaving on the shelf when a life is stolen, especially when we think about a child. This is the leading cause of death for children in this country. The leading cause of death. Not cancer, not car accidents. And that is the secret sauce. And I say secret sauce not in a cold way or callous way, but that is something that is so hard to unsee and unfeel. I don't care who you are. In this role that I have, I get to travel all across the country, to the reddest of red places, to the bluest, the purples, and all in between. And there's not one person that is okay with that fact, that statistic. I think what I've seen change over time is the fact that there are more rooms. And what that does is lights fire under people because it is something that you, like you said, there's a club that you did not sign up for. And I want to just give some love to Mia, who's in the front, also a survivor of gun violence, who advocates right alongside with us and does incredible work. But because of that, there's a fire. You don't want one more family, one more community to suffer like this. It's also changed because while this is focusing on school shootings, which is horrible, you gave the statistic, but it made us understand at Moms Demand Action it is school shootings, and it is daily community gun violence. It is domestic violence and the access to the firearm. It's unintentional shootings when someone doesn't secure their firearm—and a kid ends up taking it to school. You have a play date, they're playing with it, and there's tragedy that strikes. So, it's changed because people are sick and tired of burying their loved ones. They're sick and tired of hearing about thoughts and prayers and no action. They're sick and tired of it. So, we see a lot of folks that are doing good work, including lawmakers, faith leaders, veterans, volunteers, moms, grandparents, everybody, because this doesn't care where you live, what race you come from. This is a public safety crisis in this country.

Jonathan Capehart 21:29

Now, Jens, you have said that hopelessness is the biggest obstacle to change when it comes to gun violence. And you say that gun violence is much different than what people think it is. Explain that, Jens.

Jens Ludwig 21:44

Yeah. Maybe let me start off with the hopelessness point. So, it's so easy to live in the United States and become totally hopeless about whether there's anything we can do about this problem. We are a country of 335 million people, and somewhere between 400 and 500 million guns. If you look at the conversation around gun law changes at the federal level, many people look at that and think that it's completely frozen. I think the best-case forecast for what would happen at the federal level is highly, highly uncertain. And looking at all of that together, I think leads people to just feel a complete sense of despair because so much of the attentional spotlight, understandably so, is on widespread gun availability, the difficulty of changing gun laws in the United States, and so on. And I think one of the real aha moments for me in doing this sort of work, and I've lived on the South Side of Chicago for the last 18 years. I run a research center called the Crime Lab at the University of Chicago, trying to be an R&D partner to cities struggling with the gun violence problem. And the realization that I had one day was that gun violence is guns plus violence. This is the sort of high-level analysis you fly someone in from the University of Chicago for. There's actually an insight to that, which is the aha moment for me was I was going around the South Side and just a little bit south of Hyde Park, where the University of Chicago is, there are two neighborhoods, South Shore to the east and Greater Grand Crossing to the west, separated by one street, Dorchester Avenue. And the thing that's so interesting about these two neighborhoods that really was a light bulb moment for me was that the poverty rate is exactly the same, the racial composition, everything about the two neighborhoods is exactly the same, except the shooting rate in Greater Grand Crossing per capita is fully twice what you see in South Shore, literally right across the street. And as I reflected on this, I thought both of these neighborhoods are in the city of Chicago with some of the most restrictive city gun laws in the country within Illinois, which has unusually restrictive state gun laws. It's just as easy to drive a gun in the trunk of your car to South Shore as it is Greater Grand Crossing. So, everything about the gun availability environment is exactly the same, and yet the rate of shootings per capita is twice as high in one neighbor—And you see this across cities as well. Chicago and New York have almost identical poverty rates. Guns are just as easy to drive from the South to Chicago as New York. The per capita murder rate in Chicago is something like five times what you see in New York City. So, even within this country in which guns are everywhere, there is an enormous variation in the gun violence problem itself, which tells you—so, if you think gun violence equals guns plus violence, if lots of places with similar gun availability and gun laws experience such radically different levels of gun violence, that tells you that the willingness of people to use guns to hurt one another itself has to matter a lot in explaining the variability across places and over time in this. And that's actually good news, because if you think that the gun control debate in the United States is stuck or highly uncertain, nobody knows what's going to happen with that. This gives us a second front to work on and try and make progress on. And the good news, as you alluded to, is I think we've learned a lot over the last couple of decades about the nature of the gun violence problem, and it's just very different from what we've long assumed.

Jonathan Capehart 25:35

Mayor Dickens, since you are the only person on this stage who has an electoral responsibility for the people who live in Atlanta, who has to deal with gun violence on a daily basis, is the problem as intractable as it seems to the general public, the wider public? And are you doing anything in Atlanta that is mitigating the problem, improving the problem? Is the problem with gun violence in Atlanta as bad now as it was, say, during the pandemic or in years previous?

Andre Dickens 26:19

Yeah. One, I'm very glad to be here to have this conversation. Thank you to Milken and for being here. And Frank, sorry about your loss. I've been in those empty rooms before. I've talked to these families, whether it's from gun violence or a drowning incident. I was just in one two weeks ago at the household of a kid who drowned on vacation. And so, I talk to every parent whenever there's been a shooting or a loss, and those never are easy. And I still have their phone numbers, and I still contact them. They ask me for jobs. They ask me for help. They ask me for housing. These people, they've lost something. The last thing they need is a politician not picking up the phone when they call. So, Frank, I'm with you and your family in that. When you said Atlanta, we have to deal with gun violence every day, actually, we do not any longer. The goal is—

Jonathan Capehart 27:19

—Don't step on that. Any longer.

Andre Dickens 27:21

Right. Any longer. For the first time in a long time, Atlanta was under 100 homicides. This is a city that we've seen over the last four years, we're down about 56 percent in homicides. And this is using all the tactics, like learnings that we've received. This is watching progress being made across our cities in America. I'm a blue city in a red state, Black mayor, majority Black city in a wider demographic in the state. Gun laws in our state can't be changed. You can walk around Atlanta, Georgia or Smyrna, Georgia, or Savannah, Georgia with a gun in your hand. This is an open carry state, and many of the politicians are very proud of that. So even with that reality, we still have brought down gun violence, and it's by taking a whole of government approach, policing and non-policing activities. I'm grateful and thankful and prayerful that we've never had a school shooting in the recent years. But we had experiences in the past at nightlife. Atlanta has a lot of entertainment, a lot of culture, and nightlife during the pandemic was unstable. Shootings were happening. And so, I became mayor. I was running for mayor in 2021, became mayor in 2022. At that time, a whole portion of Atlanta wanted out of Atlanta. There's a portion called Buckhead, our wealthier enclave, said, "We can't take the violence anymore, and we need something to happen. So, we're going to create our own city so we can have a million cops on every corner." I said, "Give me a chance to kind of rectify that." And now they want to stay, and things are going well. The youth crime is way down. So, my thesis was if you bring down youth crime, you bring down crime overall in a substantial way. Atlanta was about 50 percent, 60 percent of the crime was conducted by people under 24. And so, now we got things for them to do—summer jobs program, after-school program. Our at-risk kids, we call it the At-Promise Center. We have four of them. So, we send you to these At-Promise Centers. We just load you up with coaching and mentoring and games and arts and culture. It just keeps you busy. Third Spaces is what the term is being called. Keeping people very busy. These kids are demanding, "Just give us stuff to do. We want to have fun. We want to make our TikTok videos. We want to play our video games. We want to make a bunch of noise," "and not get in trouble for it." So, we got from all kinds of events and activities. And then the nightlife, we created a nightlife division. Nightlife crime has gone down way, way—I think we only had one incident of gun violence at nightlife over the past two years, because we stood up

a nightlife division and taught the nightlife operators how to reduce gun violence. Just because you're a party promoter and people like you and you got a venue, doesn't mean you know what you're doing. And so, we've trained them. But the youth component of it, summer jobs, 20,000 kids right now are making at a minimum $15 an hour at our great corporate headquarters or our nonprofits, et cetera. And they're making money. They're earning and learning. And so, we're just grateful that we were able to do that. And I'm seeing other mayors. At Baltimore, Brandon Scott, he's doing an amazing job. We're colleagues. Us mayors, we lament together, and we celebrate together and we learn from each other.

Jonathan Capehart 31:06

I know about your text chains.

Andre Dickens 31:07

Yeah. We stay up on each other's. We say, "Hey, I'm going to steal that. That thing that you're doing or that concert you have for the youth, or that after-school program, Mayor, tell me about that." And just one last final point. I'm from this city. I grew up when Atlanta was hot with homicides. The missing and murdered children was a thing, where 20 plus kids. We used to be afraid to go to school. You'd see a bus or a van, and you'd have to stay in the back and hide because guys were. This was trafficking. We didn't have a term for it back then, but I was six, seven years old. Atlanta had a problem with crime, and crime waves go up and down. But we really are intentional about making sure that we reduce violence in Atlanta for these families. And it's also bad for business, it's bad for community development. It's unhealthy. It's a public health epidemic, the pervasiveness of gun violence across America.

Jonathan Capehart 32.07

Jens, before you jump in, I just want to have the folks put the QR code up on the screen. So, if you have a question, scan the QR code. There it is. Scan the QR code and put in a message or a question, and I'll get it here on the iPad and try to incorporate your question into the conversation. Jens, you wanted to jump in while the mayor was speaking. What was he saying that got you animated?

Jens Ludwig 32:33

What I wanted to do is I want to point out that there is a profoundly important mindset shift implicit in what the mayor is talking about and what the mayor is doing that I want to make explicit, because I think it helps make a lot of things about what we've been doing successfully over the last couple of years to address gun violence make sense. So, I have a book that came out last year called "Unforgiving Places" that handfuls of people across the country have read.

Angela Ferrell-Zabala 33:05

Handfuls.

Jens Ludwig 33:06

And for that book, I spent a huge amount of time looking at every survey that I could find that asked representative samples of Americans, "Why do you think people are willing to hurt other people with guns or knives or whatever it is?" And what becomes very clear is most Americans overwhelmingly believe one of two conventional wisdoms. There's a bunch of people who think that the reason that people engage in violent crime is they're just morally bad. Everybody's heard the term super predators. It's no accident. They're morally bad. They're not afraid of what the criminal justice system's going to do to them. So, the only thing that you can do is just threaten them with bigger criminal justice sticks. Almost all Americans who don't believe that believe a different conventional wisdom is that violent crime is due to bad economic circumstances. You've got low-income people who are going to do whatever it takes to feed themselves, their families. The only thing that you can do to prevent gun violence is to make the alternatives to crime more lucrative, better jobs, social programs, whatever. If under that conventional wisdom, you hear things like mentoring programs in a city, and you're like, "What a waste of time." I've heard this a lot in Chicago. "Why are you wasting your time with that stuff that's a distraction from the real problem, which is that we've got a city with a lot of poverty, a lot of segregation, all this other stuff? Focus on the root causes." And I think when people are articulating this conventional wisdom, I think ... And I can see why people have this conventional wisdom, because the news coverage overrepresents things like hierarchical gangs engaging in premeditated gun violence over drug selling corners. *The Wire* is the picture that everybody has about gun violence—And that is not what most shootings in America are. Something like 80 percent of shootings in America are arguments that escalate and end in tragedy because someone's got a gun. They're in the moment, terrible decision-making. Okay? And that suggests two types of things that we can do through policy that I think are having big benefits, but only make sense once you realize that that is the problem. So, it's no accident that the mayor mentioned—I think this is the thing that—set off the light bulb. The mayor mentioned we've got a ton of violence problem in the nightlife district of Atlanta. There is an enormous amount of predictable structure of when and where gun violence happens. The bars let out at 2:00 in the morning or whenever they let out in Atlanta. That is going to be where you've got a bunch of drunk people who've been staring each other down all night in a bar, congregate on the sidewalk and whatever. And every police department in the country now is getting better and better, and hopefully they'll continue to get better, to use data to understand when and where gun violence is happening and be there so that they can deescalate and prevent this. And the second thing that we've been doing, more and more cities, I'm sure your city's been doing this, lots of cities around the country have been doing this, is investing in nonprofit organizations doing what's called community violence intervention—So, you might have heard the acronym CVI.

Jens Ludwig 36:18

If you believe the conventional wisdom that the only thing that you can do is carrots or sticks, these community violence intervention programs like we're going to mentor kids to make better decisions makes absolutely no sense. We're going to put violence interrupters out on the street to deescalate conflict between people or groups of people. It's like, what sort of idiocy is that? You're not addressing the poverty

problem. And that kind of thing only starts to make sense once you understand the problem is arguments plus guns.

Jonathan Capehart 36:52

Go jump in, Angela.

Angela Ferrell-Zabala 36:54

Yes, I am ready. Thank you. You got me fired up right now. So, what I'm pulling from all of this is there's access problem, and there's also a trauma issue here. So, let's talk about both of those things, and you both are kind of touching on it. So, when we think about access, we think about the fact that in many places it is easier to get a gun in your hand than a meal on your table, than get a job, than get health care. So that is a major problem, and there's some states like that. Like I said, I travel around many, and I am so shocked to hear that an 18-year-old can get an AR-style rifle, but has issues getting a job or food on the table, like I said. It doesn't make any sense to me. So, the access problem is real. There's sometimes when I have conversations with people, especially when I travel internationally, and they don't understand what we're doing over here in this country, why we can't get ourselves together. And it's about access. We hear mental health often. I'm going to talk about trauma, but we are not the only place in the world where people go through crisis, but we are the only place that it's easier to get your hands on a firearm. And there's so many policies, whether it's around trafficking, and we can go on and on about the policy side. On the trauma side, it's unaddressed, like you're saying. And so, when you think about investments in community violence intervention programs, you think about the people closest to the problem, understanding exactly what their folks need. Many survivors of gun violence themselves are getting the resources that they need to prevent the next shooting from happening. Because oftentimes, like you said, the violence is concentrated when we think about community violence in particular places. I live in Washington, DC. One block is this way, another block is that way, and that's what a lot of major urban areas look like. You can probably attest to that. So, I think we got to get better and invest in health care, mental health care, access to all the things that we're hearing on the stage today. The social determinants of health care are really important. And also look at the policy solutions to access to firearms. And I'm not suggesting we take them away. I got gun owners in my family, got it, and nothing's wrong with that, but you need to make sure that not just anyone can get their hands on a gun. And the last thing I'll say is we got to get ahead of technology. We are doing a lot of policy around 3D printing of weapons. You don't even have to get a background check. It's unserialized. You can just print something out. You can get a switch printed and put it in a handgun, and you can essentially change it into an automatic weapon. So, here we are. Lots of policy and also focus on the trauma piece as well.

Jonathan Capehart 39:28

Mr. Mayor?

Andre Dickens 39:29

Yeah, Jonathan. Hearing this, what you mentioned was escalating disputes. Escalating disputes or sudden anger is the leading cause of gun violence in the streets of just about any city. Every single morning, I talk to our chief of police because I wanted to make sure that we brought down crime. We got a new police chief. When I came in, I got someone who had been through the community-based policing model where we don't just do law and order, but we also understand how to be throughout a community. So, we created a Cure Violence model. We have the Mayor's Office of Violence Reduction. They're separate from the police. They work with them when necessary, but they have to be trusted in the community. So, they go into the community, the hot spots, and they try to do healing, deescalation tactics, how to resolve conflicts without a gun. Because guns plus anger has had too many bad outcomes, and that sudden anger, that inability to resolve a dispute, has led to death, brother on brother, uncle on nephew, domestic violence, partner on partner. We've done a huge amount of campaigns. If you're driving through the city of Atlanta, you see on billboards, you see on digital billboards, No More campaign, no more to domestic violence. If you're feeling certain way, call this number. We're very intentional about bringing down violence in the home because police can't solve a domestic violence issue or a sudden anger issue exactly in that moment. So, what we have to do is be very communicative about the goals of society is for us to get along and communicate together. In that Cure Violence, we have the Mayor's Office of Violence Reduction, and they go out, and they do healing sessions, they do listening, and we do anti-retaliation. We're not in a utopia where we're going to get to zero issues ever. When there is an issue, you got to make sure that those cousins that show up to that hospital saying, "Who did it?"—that 30 minutes later, you don't have another emergency room operation that's about to happen because they're going to drive right to the last spot and get those guys. And we try to have anti-retaliation sessions saying, "Hey, before you do that, let's figure this out. Why is this happening? What's this?" And we reduce the retaliation. The get-back is real. Or the situations at the nightlife. We've talked to the nightlife owners. If two guys are fighting in the club, yes, nobody has a gun inside of the club. But if two guys are fighting in the club, you don't let them both out, you don't kick them both out, because they're going to shoot up the parking lot and a whole bunch of innocent bystanders. And that's bad for your business because nobody's going to show up to your spot tomorrow or next weekend. We have a process for how you let out the aggressor and let them get 30, 40 minutes up the road. I'm an engineer, so, I'm very tactical. I don't want to go down a thousand pages of how we do this. But the point is we take it seriously. We're very intentional. We learn, and we read, and we try to understand, and we get better, and we're iterative. And the last thing I'll say is you have to do it with compassion. If it's not genuine, these families are very real people. And then when they come back into the system and say, "I want to help," you give them an outlet to be able to help, because their testimonies talk to someone and it helps them personalize these issues versus it's just guns. No, it's more than that. It's society. It's very much the community we're trying to build together.

Jonathan Capehart 42:53

Mr. Blackwell, I'm curious what you think of this conversation that's been happening between the mayor and Angela and Jens. In the six years since Dominic's murder, you've talked to a lot of people. You've talked to a lot of families. And I wonder if, for those families, for yourself, the conversation that you're hearing here on this stage gets at what you are looking for, what the families are looking for. Or are they missing the mark in some way?

Frank Blackwell 43:36

No. I think on a broader gun violence prevention aspect, those all are great ideas and great processes. For us, and kind of the message that I spread is just that we all find ways to empower parents to pay attention to your children, be there, and be present for them. And I know that's not always easy. But we try to spend as much—Our priority is family time, spend as much time with our family as possible, as much time with the children as possible, so we can ask those kinds of questions. In our specific situation, the person that went to the school to commit the shooting was a student who also seemed like the mother was not paying very much attention. So, situations like this, I think it's important to, I guess you could say, also hold the parents accountable. My son gets a trophy for football. He gets honor roll. My one son, Derek, he's graduating next week, two weeks, something like that—But he's on honor roll, and he made it into the Honor Society and everything, and it's a good job. But it's also not just a good job to the parents, but if your child does something like this, you need to hold the parents accountable as well. Why were you not paying attention? How did you not notice the signs? I know it's not always super easy, but it needs to go both ways. So, just developing programs that can empower parents and families to emphasize that focus on paying attention and what the signs are, knowing when to intervene, and how to intervene, and what to do, I think is also very important as well.

Jonathan Capehart 45:21

Joshua, when we were trying to get the clip of the trailer up, inadvertently, the picture was shown of a mural. If we can put that picture back up, because folks might have focused in on the mural, but not who was standing in front of it and what she was holding. So, here we are. It's up on the screen now—Joshua.

Joshua Seftel 45:48

Can I just frame this?

Jonathan Capehart 45:49

Yeah.

Joshua Seftel 45:49

So, the way I feel about, and I'm going to get to this picture in a second, about this issue is I have sort of a blend of continued concern and hope. And the concern is around people like Mia Tretta, who's here in the front row. Mia was with Dominic, standing next to him when he was shot and killed. She was also shot in the abdomen, and Mia survived and went on to go to Brown University a few years later, where late last year, she was in her second school shooting. And that's the concern is that we're now reaching the point where people are starting to have their second—mass shooting that they've witnessed, been a part of. Where I feel hope is with people like Mia, who is an amazing activist and advocate and is traveling the

country, is here today, traveling the country, working to try to create change. People like Frank, who are traveling the country and speaking about this. And then another place where I feel hope is this photograph. That's a photo of Gloria Casares. It's in Uvalde, Texas. And Gloria, for those of you who watched the Academy Awards, when our film, *All the Empty Rooms* won, we gave the microphone to Gloria to speak about her daughter Jackie. And Gloria, we've been passing the Oscar statuette around to the parents so that they can have it, and Gloria chose to bring it to the grave of Jackie, as well as to the mural, to share it with her. And what I see in this picture is, I see hope because I see that Gloria is holding this up to show Jackie that the world is paying attention, that the world does care, that you all who are here today, you care about this. And if we all care enough, we can create change.

Jonathan Capehart 48:11

We have less than five minutes for Q&A, and I apologize to all of you who sent in questions. There are a lot of questions that require detailed answers, and we don't have time. So, I'm going to go to one of the earlier ones, and whoever wants to answer it can jump in. And the question is: “What's the most effective intervention you've seen that doesn't get enough attention or funding, and what would it take to scale it”?

Jens Ludwig 48:42

Mayor, do you want to—

Angela Ferrell-Zabala 48:44

—Go ahead. You're ready.

Andre Dickens 48:47

I have an answer, but I'd much rather hear—

Jens Ludwig 48:49

—Yeah, no, please, Mr. Mayor. Go ahead.

Andre Dickens 48:54

For me, I would say it sounds trite, but youth programming. It sounds like it's just an easy, of course, Department of Parks and Recreation. But you can never under-invest in the future of these young people, especially things that are around mentoring. Because everybody's household is not stable, right? And when you have an unstable household, those kids learn unstable behavior sometimes. So, that mentorship, that's

that coach, that very well-respected person in the community. They don't have to be famous. They just have to be available and good. They don't have to make $100,000 or more. They just have to be stable and consistent. You see kids walk across the graduation line, and they shout out that mentor—Mom or dad may not even be at the graduation, but that mentor is there. That's the person that they really, really trust in the community. So a trusted, committed person that is at a youth program, an after-school program, a weekend program, a summer program, or the Big Brothers, Big Sisters, the Girl Scouts, and all of those. We can't under-invest in those things because households are just unstable right now in certain places and certain reasons. And then I would say the Cure Violence and violence interrupters that go into the hotspots, and they're trusted. They can keep the temperature cool.

Jonathan Capehart 50:25

Be mindful of the clock. Two minutes and 30 seconds. Jens, did you want to—

Jens Ludwig 50:30

—Oh, no. You can go to the next question. Yeah, sorry. I don't want to filibuster the—

Jonathan Capehart 50:34

—Angela?

Angela Ferrell-Zabala 50:34

Yeah, I'll just say we all have something to contribute to this. It's an ecosystem. Whatever you can bring, whether you're running a city or you are a survivor of gun violence, we all have something to contribute to this problem.

Jonathan Capehart 50:46

One question that came in, and this might be an easy one to answer. The person wrote, "Gun violence feels intractable. I fear that every family will need to experience gun violence before change happens. We do not allow citizens to operate vehicles without ensuring the risk created by operating a vehicle. Should we demand firearm insurance? Would it have an impact?"

Angela Ferrell-Zabala 51:10

I'll just tell you that that's something we're working on. I'll quickly say, most things in this country, there's consumer protections and ways that we can actually sue. If something happens, if your baby, the crib breaks, and something happens to and injures your infant, then you can come back to that company. This industry, the gun industry, is impenetrable at this point, and we are fighting like hell with PLCAA. You can go look that up, but that is a thing. We got to hold the industry accountable. It starts upstream. These programs are all important, but we can't look at the person with a finger on the trigger and think that's going to solve the problem, before we look at a $9 billion industry that is making money off of the destruction in our communities, and they can change these things. You don't need an act of God to do it, even though we should be praying for them. But this is something that we can do every day. So I would say that I see a lot of movement, and I know it feels like a mountain up a mountain, and it is hard, but we are making movement. We definitely are making movement on this issue.

Jonathan Capehart 52:09

Less than a minute. I am going to give Mr. Blackwell, you the last word. Just your final thoughts.

Frank Blackwell 52:17

Oh, yeah. Just on behalf of our family and Dominic, absolutely thank you guys all for being here. Like I said earlier, just pay attention. Hug your children. Pay attention to them. Spend all the extra time with them, with all your family members as well. Because yeah, you never know the last time you see someone is going to be the absolute last time that you see them. So just spend the extra time. Read the book. Take them to the park. Take the trip. Nothing is more important than spending time with your family.

Jonathan Capehart 52:53

Frank Blackwell, Mayor Andre Dickens, Angela Ferrell-Zabala, Jens Ludwig, Joshua Seftel, thank you all very much for being part of this important conversation. [Applause]

Announcer 53:09

We hope you enjoyed the discussion. Please make your way to your next session.