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Lt. Gov. Austin Davis Visits Lancaster's Bench Mark Program to Highlight State Budget Investments for Safer Communities

Shapiro-Davis Budget Provides More Resources for Violence Intervention and Prevention (VIP) Grants and Domestic Violence Services

Lancaster, PA – Lt. Gov. Austin Davis visited the Bench Mark Program in Lancaster today to highlight how the newly signed, bipartisan state budget will help make Pennsylvania communities safer through more investments in violence intervention and prevention programs like the ones offered by Bench Mark for local youth.

“Addressing the epidemic of gun violence requires a comprehensive approach, including supporting law enforcement, addressing the root causes and funding community-based solutions like the Bench Mark Program,” said **Lt. Gov. Davis**, who chairs the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). “We also must support victims and survivors, to help them heal from their trauma and repair our communities. The bipartisan state budget does all of that and more.”

Last week Gov. Josh Shapiro signed the 2024-25 state budget, which:

- Invests **\$45 million** in proven community-based programs to reduce violence through PCCD, including doubling state funding for the successful Violence Intervention and Prevention (VIP) program with a **\$5 million increase**, which supports a wide range of models focused on reducing community violence and relies on community groups that are most in tune with specific local needs;
- Invests **\$11.5 million** to create a statewide Building Opportunity through Out of School Time (BOOST) program through PCCD, which will aim to reduce community violence by providing more afterschool learning opportunities for young people;
- Includes a **\$5 million increase** for the Nonprofit Security Grant Fund at PCCD, which provides resources for places of worship, community centers, and other entities to equip themselves with security measures;
- Increases funding for domestic violence services by an **additional \$2.5 million** through the PA Department of Human Services (DHS).

The bipartisan budget also includes an infusion of **\$5 million** in state dollars into the Crime Victims Compensation Fund, which PCCD administers. Over the past five years, PCCD has paid more than 76,000 claims totaling more than \$65 million in eligible expenses.

“Our kids deserve to grow up and grow old, but far too often, their lives are taken from us by guns and gun violence,” said **state Rep. Ismail Smith-Wade-EI**. “Our Commonwealth takes these critical actions to stop the flow of guns into our community and increase programming for young people not only for prevention, but for the potential our young people have to thrive in a world without violence, without firearms.

“The PCCD, under the Lieutenant Governor’s leadership, engages with local nonprofits like Bench Mark as a partner, delivering over \$600,000 in much-needed resources and support to our young people to see who they become when the Commonwealth invests in them.”

While homicides declined by 17 percent in Pennsylvania between 2022 and 2023, they increased by 50 percent in Lancaster County during that same timeframe. Youth gun involvement and gun violence is a particular and growing concern in Lancaster County.

“As a nurse and former health care executive, I've seen the increased impact that guns and gun violence has had on youth injuries and death rates -- let alone the mental health toll it takes on families and communities,” said **Lancaster County Commissioner Alice Yoder**. “We need to do more to address the issue of gun violence by focusing on upstream solutions that save lives, avoid future costs in the criminal justice system, reduce demand on services and improve public safety.”

“Gun violence has no place in Pennsylvania,” said **Lancaster Mayor Danene Sorace**. “In Lancaster, our officers are getting illegal guns off the street, and community organizations like Bench Mark are leaning into youth engagement in new ways. I am pleased the Shapiro-Davs Administration and PCCD are equipping Lancaster with more tools to keep our community safe. Curbing gun violence must be an all-hands-on-deck effort.”

Founded in 2014, Bench Mark Program began by offering free personal training to “at-risk” youth identified by local high schools and community partners, using weightlifting to build trust and teach the value of goal setting and hard work. As participation grew over the years, Bench Mark expanded its services to focus on youth/student leadership development, with participating youth eventually becoming peer mentors themselves.



Lt. Gov. Austin Davis tours the Bench Mark Program in Lancaster; additional photos/video available at [PACast.com](https://www.pacast.com)

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