



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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From the Desk of Mayor Cignetti: Nurturing Community Solutions to Prevent Violence in Scranton

There is no denying that the last month in Scranton has been difficult. It's important that our residents know how devoted our administration is to tackling these challenges.

We are being tested right now, but we are ready for it thanks to years of preparation.

Recently we've seen in real time the important work of our law enforcement officers who protect us, working with partners at all levels to solve crimes and remove drugs, guns, and gang members from our streets. This collaborative work is not new, but our focus on it is renewed after a violent attack against our own officers.

Over the last four years, we have reformed how city government works. We've invested in tools to help police work more safely and effectively, added technology to make doing business easier, and implemented financial policies that earned us an investment-grade credit rating.

With renewed financial stability, an aggressive grant strategy, and opportunities created by the Biden administration like the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), we are investing in critical services and data analysis to get ahead of problems.

We seek expertise so we have the best resources possible. Scranton ARPA dollars are funding a Community Health & Safety Landscape Analysis that will help our police department develop additional strategic approaches to counter violent crime and identify gaps in existing social services. Our work with the Trotter Collaborative for Social Justice at the Harvard Kennedy School and participation in the National Youth Employment Coalition focuses on connecting disengaged youths to career paths.

This week, we sent legislation to City Council to reallocate \$580,626 in ARPA funds to enable the creation of a gang violence initiative that mirrors successful programs in other cities, building on the violence prevention dollars in our original ARPA plan.

Creating a city that works for all its residents cannot happen alone.

We have strengthened partnerships across sectors to enhance critical services and address root causes of violence. The Scranton Youth Engagement Council brings together government, law enforcement, school administration, non-profits, service and healthcare providers, community

leaders, and philanthropy. The Council meets regularly to plan the annual Youth Job Fair, brainstorm youth programming initiatives, and discuss trends in youth behavior and needs.

Scranton has disbursed \$4.5 million of ARPA dollars to support non-profits that reach youth in underserved neighborhoods. We've helped the NEPA Youth Shelter expand rehousing services, funded Outreach's GED program development, and granted money to the Boys & Girls Club.

Investments in workforce, education, housing assistance, childcare, wellness, behavioral health, and violence prevention complement investments in our police department to try to prevent young people from going down the wrong path.

City government and the Scranton School District are working together, from our Shared Services Committee to district officials at the table on Youth Engagement, from student art decorating the entrance of City Hall to playground projects at Kennedy and Whittier elementary schools, and to our shared development coordinator who seeks grants that unlock capacity for both entities.

We've brought together community councils focused on hunger and housing as well as the arts. Addressing problems often tied to poverty while creating positive opportunities for children presents alternatives to violent behavior.

Work in our recreational spaces totals over \$9.5 million, including new playground equipment at Connors, Novembrino, and North Scranton Mini Parks. More improvements are coming at Capouse, Connell, Nay Aug, Oakmont, and Robinson Parks, as well as Weston Field, where we are adding a skate park and getting student input on the design.

We can never fully prevent crime. There are bad actors in every community, but our history of catching criminals is stellar. Scranton has the best police department across the region, if not the entire Commonwealth. We are fortunate and grateful.

By continuing to strengthen law enforcement partnerships, make targeted investments, research what works in other cities, gather community councils, increase mental healthcare access, and focus on aspirations for our city, we will continue to face Scranton's challenges head-on.

Working together and attacking our problems from multiple angles will nurture the tremendous Scranton community our kids deserve.