

Statement on Mass Shooting at 1409 Washington Ave. on June 11, 2023

Sadly, the mass shooting that occurred in Downtown St. Louis was entirely predictable. In fact, it was inevitable. Large groups of young people out late at night, alcohol, guns, unregulated short-term rentals, irresponsible landlords, and illegal bars are a volatile combination.

The usual tired responses of our local elected officials to this horrific violence are no different than “thoughts and prayers” offered by those who stubbornly defend permissive gun laws. More late-night activities for teens? Why encourage young teens to be out at 2 am? More pleas for parents to not drop off kids downtown? How many times have we heard that after each tragic event? It’s all the state’s fault for enacting permissive gun laws so there’s nothing we can do. More press conferences and photo-ops?

We hear Mayor Jones’ words and don’t doubt her sincerity or her care for the community, but it’s time to move beyond those words toward serious, continuing, resolute action by city government, SLMPD, and civic groups.

It’s time for some honesty on all sides. Yes, it is unconscionable for access to guns to be so permissive and we urge the state to consider some commonsense restrictions. But given how many guns are already in circulation and how many guns on the street are stolen, it is foolish to believe that will have any near-term impact.

Regional solutions for crime and violence are only a vague concept right now, and similarly will not occur in the near-term, if ever.

To continue to rely on stale rhetoric or to suggest that there’s nothing we can do now to make our communities safer is wrong. For the moment, at least, there is no substitute for more effective law enforcement. As our [recent report](#) pointed out, proactive law enforcement rarely happens because too few officers are patrolling downtown. Police are too often just reacting to incidents after they occur.

And even when perpetrators, especially juveniles, are detained by police, there are ultimately no consequences. That sends the wrong message to kids and their parents.

Ordinances that address the sources of violent behavior are important, but they must be effective and enforceable now. Half-measures enacted just to say that we did *something* are an offense to our communities and to the victims of violence. Ordinances must be specific, enforceable, and resources made available to enforce them.

An ordinance to regulate short-term rentals is now under consideration, but as written it is easy to evade and nearly impossible to enforce. It has taken years to get this bill considered and, if passed, it will take years to implement. Some select amendments to the bill can make it effective.

The Board of Aldermen is now considering a bill to make it easier for problem operators to get liquor licenses. On what planet is that a good thing? While it does take too long for responsible owners to get licenses, creating loopholes to allow almost anybody to get a license is just inviting even more trouble than we now face.

The Board is also considering an ordinance to allow for some reasonable regulation of open carry of weapons. We have seen too many pictures of young people wielding semi-automatic weapons on our streets. It has been suggested that a limited, commonsense, method of limiting open carry is racist or somehow related to “stop and frisk”. That is a red herring being used for political purposes. Again, more honesty is needed.

If we truly care about our community, our kids, and the many victims of crime and violence, we can no longer treat law enforcement as if it’s not part of the solution. For the summer ahead, it may be the only solution.