



# Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

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## **Mayor Fenty Announces Plans for School Violence Reduction Partnership with the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, East Capitol Center for Change, and Peaceoholics**

The District of Columbia government plans to contract with the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (CNE) to implement the CNE Violence-Free Zone program in two DC public schools in an effort to reduce youth violence, Mayor Adrian Fenty announced at a media conference today. The Center and its community partners East Capitol Center for Change and Peaceoholics will implement the VFZ program in Ward 8's Johnson Junior High School and Anacostia Senior High School.

The \$824,000 contract planned between Washington, DC's Metropolitan Police Department and the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise marks the first time the DC government has allocated funding for the Violence Free Zone school initiative. The community-based Violence-Free Zone program is unique in that it utilizes the experiences and talents of young adults from the same backgrounds as the students. These young adults, called Youth Advisors, act as hall and cafeteria monitors, mentors, counselors, conflict resolvers, and role models. Because they have faced and overcome the same challenges as the students, the Youth Advisors receive their trust, respect, and confidences, and are able to defuse incidents and resolve conflicts before they erupt into violence. The Youth Advisors will be selected, trained, and employed by East Capitol Center for Change and Peaceoholics. The Violence-Free Zone school program will operate under the management, guidance, and oversight of the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise.

Evidence from schools around the country that have the Violence-Free Zone initiative proves significant reductions in suspensions, code of conduct violations, fighting, and gang incidents. (See attached Results and School Information.) The goal of the Violence-Free Zone initiative is to support the school administration and teachers and create a climate in which education can thrive.

The community-based VFZ program was previously implemented by CNE and East Capitol Center for Change in five DC schools (Davis Elementary, Sousa Middle School, Fletcher-Johnson K-8, Kelly Miller Middle School, and H.D. Woodson Senior High) with excellent results and high praise from the principals and staff of those schools. Those efforts were mostly supported with private funds, including a \$1 million grant from Chevron, but the staff had to be withdrawn from most of the schools when grant funding was expended.

The Peaceoholics have been recognized for their work in a number of DC schools, including Anacostia, Ballou, Theodore Roosevelt, H.D. Woodson, Eastern, and Spingarn High Schools; John and Pr. Harris Junior High Schools; and Kramer Middle School. In 2006, the Peaceoholics successfully brokered more than 50 truces between some of the toughest crews in the Nation's Capital. Most recently, the Washington Post reported how the

Peaceoholics resolved a conflict between two neighborhoods that started after a youth was slain outside Anacostia High School.

“We are delighted that Mayor Fenty has recognized the success of the Violence-Free Zone approach,” said CNE President Robert L. Woodson, Sr. “We are also grateful to those funders who made it possible for us over the past few years to demonstrate how effective the Violence-Free Zone approach can be in reducing violence and changing the culture of the schools.”

The Violence-Free Zone initiative is directed by the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, and is presently implemented in 21 schools across the country, including Atlanta, Baltimore, Dallas, Milwaukee, Washington, DC, and Prince George’s County, MD. The new DC schools project will be implemented by East Capitol Center for Change and Peaceoholics. In addition to the school activity, both organizations have long-standing after-school, weekend, and summer programs that offer some of the most at-risk young people a safe haven and support at all times.

The Violence-Free Zone initiative had its roots in Washington, DC, when in January of 1997, the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise and a grassroots organization negotiated a truce between the warring Avenue and Circle youth factions in the Benning Terrace public housing development, known then as “Simple City.” Programs of job training and employment, life skills and volunteer-led sports activities have sustained the peace, which has been maintained over the past 10 years with no crew-related killings. CNE exported the principles of the Benning Terrace success to other urban centers in crisis. In Dallas, the VFZ was brought into the public schools, where it had almost immediate success in stopping violence. In Dallas’ Madison High School, for instance, gang incidents were reduced from 113 to 0.

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise was founded in 1981 by Robert L. Woodson, Sr., to help residents of low-income neighborhoods address the problems of their communities. CNE provides training and technical assistance and linkages to support to community-based organizations. East Capitol Center for Change was founded by Curtis Watkins in 1996. In addition to the Violence-Free Zone initiative in the schools, ECCC provides a variety of after-school, weekend, and summer programs for youth and families. Peaceoholics, founded jointly by Ronald Moten and Jauhar Abraham, provides youth and family programs, violence intervention, and youth motivation services, and has been instrumental in negotiating truces in a number of potentially violent situations.