

# Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams and A.T. Williams Announce Formation of Gun Violence Task Force

June 2, 2022

**Mayor Eric Adams:** It is hot, but our communities are hot every day. And I say this over and over on the campaign trail, I'm not new to this, I'm true to this. I'm true to this. And nothing personifies that more than the people who are here today. A.T. Mitchell, Erica Ford, Tamika, K. Bain, we've been in the field together for a long time. And some of the names, Vanessa Gibson. We have been doing this for a long time and history is going to show that. The first crisis management funding came from an idea I had in the State Senate called SNUG, guns spelled backwards. First the allocation of money, first, and it has moved into the movement you see behind us. And so when people believe that folks of color want to normalize gun violence in their community, they are wrong. They are wrong. This is a real issue that we want to attack head on, but what we don't want to do is minimize the complete picture that must be addressed.

**Mayor Adams:** By the time a person picks up a gun, we've already failed. We've already failed. And I've said this over and over again, there are many rivers that feed the sea of violence and it's time to dam every river. Not just one with law enforcement. Damming every river is what we are going to do. The epidemic of gun violence is not a New York problem.

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mayor Adams:** It's not a Democrat-Republican problem. Tulsa is a red state. The shooting that took place there was a red state. Just an announcement came over just a few minutes ago of a 16-year-old attempting to recruit others in Berkeley to go in and shoot up a school.

**Audience:** Wow.

**Mayor Adams:** Every day we're hearing about this. It's breaking our hearts, breaking our bodies, and breaking our communities. When a bullet hits the target, the physical bullet stops, but the emotional trauma rips apart the anatomy of our entire community. And there have been more mass shootings, think about this for a moment, more mass shootings in America than days of the years. It's unbelievable, and we have normalized it. We say it's okay. And I think we often dismiss it because the victim of handguns violence for the most part are Black and brown and in the inner cities all across America, so we've normalized it and stated that is just the way it has to be. And we're saying today, "You're damn right it's not going to be that way. We can turn it around and make it happen."

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mayor Adams:** It's not a big city problem, it's an America problem. The proliferation of guns that are impacting our communities and the rise of radicalization.

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mayor Adams:** That's the focus that we are ignoring, and the role of social media on attempting to allow this radicalizing of people across our city, in their homes. It's the culture that says this, "You have the right to feel more powerful and more important than your right to live in peace in our communities." And so we are here today to gather and reject that mindset. Coming from different philosophies, outlooks, and belief, coming together to unify around one cause, and that cause is to end gun violence. And so today I am announcing a new task force to formalize my Executive Order 19, it will be co-chaired by A.T. Mitchell.

[Applause]

**Mayor Adams:** A.T., which is a long advocate in this space, that I have known for 30 years. 30 years of being on the ground, of fighting hard for this issue. And some people say, "Well, what about his background?" Well, what about my background? What about all of our backgrounds?

**Audience:** Right. Talk about it.

**Mayor Adams:** We're not looking for a nun. We're looking for someone that's not afraid to be in the street and embrace our people. We're looking for the right person for the job. And A.T. is the right person for the job. Founder of Man Up!, a violence prevention and community development organization in East New York, what used to be the murder capital of our country, on the ground every day. I'm proud to have him here. 20 years of experience designing and delivering proven solutions that contribute to safer neighborhoods. He will be co-chairing the task force with Deputy Mayor Sheena Wright.

**Audience:** All right. Okay.

**Mayor Adams:** Think about that for a moment. Think about that for a moment. The person on the ground is co-chairing with a deputy mayor. The highest end of my government is being focused on this issue in a real way. The task force members will include every deputy mayor, police commissioner, chancellor, everyone that impacts or touches the lives of a young people will be part of the solution of dealing with gun violence because we can't continue to believe that because you made an arrest, you solved the problem. The problem is why our children haven't or feel they have the need to have guns in the first place. That is where the failure has already took place.

**Mayor Adams:** Even as we see the shocking headlines across the nation and the endless feed of these guns. We took close to 3,000 illegal guns off our streets since January. 3,000. And they continue to come in. So the answer can't be just downstream making arrests. The answer is going upstream, preventing people from being and having these guns in the hands of our children in the first place. We're seeing a substantial decrease in shootings, 30 percent. Decrease in homicide, 30 percent. But you know what those numbers mean? Nothing. Because you tell that to the mother of 11-year-old child that was shot and killed.

**Audience:** That's too much. Right. That's right.

**Mayor Adams:** So we don't want to throw around stats. We want to make sure we give the resources to the people that need it that's on the ground. And we're going to do more. This is an all hands on deck moment. All of my agencies will be involved. Every agency will have a liaison to speak directly with the leaders of the crisis management team with A.T. and Deputy Mayor Sheena Wright. The task force will ensure the community's safety, agencies responsible and support to those first responders. We're going to expand the definition of first responders, because first responders are not only

the police, EMT, FDNY. They're the CMS. Add those new three letters to the definition of first responders.

[Applause]

**Mayor Adams:** We're going to expand the program with proving records. We're going to have Summer Youth Program, Saturday Night Lights. They will engage with communities most impacted by violence, identifying gaps and getting the resources to build on them. We're going to make sure people who are in need are connected with our Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, so we could deal with mental health issues. Healthcare. Affordable housing. We're going to ensure that our affordable housing teams are in place. We're going to ensure housing of those who are returning citizens.

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mayor Adams:** Can go into some form of housing, so they don't go back into incarceration. We got to make sure our children are screened for dyslexia. 30 percent of our inmates are dyslexic. That's why David Banks is going to be part of this task force. We need to make sure that our parks are open and clean in communities that need them. Sports programs. And yes, instead of G-U-N-S, let me give you another four letters. How about J-O-B-S? Let's get our children jobs. Let's put them on a pathway of employment.

**Mayor Adams:** That's why we have 100,000 summer youth jobs, first time in the city history. Thank you, Jumaane Williams, for pushing this for years. That is why we're pushing to tell corporate America we want a 100 percent paid internship program throughout the school year. Leading into our foster care children to give them the support they need, so they don't age out at 21. Give them mentors until they're 26. All of these things are going to help us deal with this issue in a real way. Time to take our city upstream and build real partnerships with people who are tired as I am of pulling people out of the river downstream. This is our moment. You did not elect me to do what everyone has done in the past. You wanted a different outcome.

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mayor Adams:** And you picked a different mayor.

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mayor Adams:** And trust me, it's a lot of noise out there. Everybody's going to critique us. Everybody's going to start telling "Why did you pick this one? Why didn't you pick that?" Because I'm the mayor. And we're going to make the decisions now to save our children with the level of urgency that we deserve. We've been on the ground too long doing this.

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mayor Adams:** Too long. And you call DSNY to say, we need to clean up a street so that we can stop hiding drugs and behind packages and no one's responding. You called to close the street to make sure you could have a basketball program and no one wants to give you the permit. You want to go to the precinct and speak to a precinct commander because you want to deescalate something, and that precinct commander is not giving you the love and respect you deserve. Those days are over.

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mayor Adams:** You are now a part of the apparatus of making our city safe. Intervention and prevention. There's a new day in the city of the new New York, where we all will benefit from it. Thank you, all of you for being here today. We're going to hold it down for our communities. Thank you, Reverend. All yours. Talk to them, A.T.

**A.T. Mitchell, Gun Violence Czar:** Wow. So again, good afternoon, everyone.

**Audience:** Good afternoon.

**Mitchell:** I, first and foremost, want to personally thank Mayor Adams for doing what he said that he would do. Even before he got into politics, he said that he was going to make a difference. And that's how he's been living his life every day since, that I've known him.

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mayor Adams:** Share your new title again.

**Mitchell:** I'm a part of a very robust group of advocates that I'm very proud...

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mitchell:** ...To be a member of.

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mitchell:** And a lot of us know each other respectfully. But thank you to Mayor Adams for naming me to the Gun Violence Prevention Czar in New York City.

[Applause]

**Mitchell:** It's a new title. It's the first ever, and it should be. As he mentioned we should want some things that are different, we've been dealing with this issue for far too long and we have been using the same tactics over and over again and we've been getting the same results. So no one should have a problem with us trying something different.

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mitchell:** Give us a chance to prove our self-worth. We are the people who are closest to the problem.

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mitchell:** So quite naturally we have the answers to those problems. There's nobody that wants gun violence to end more than the young people who come from the neighborhoods and the people who live in this community every single day. And so this is a community-driven approach. When you hear about the state or the feds and now the city, now include the community.

**Audience:** That's right.

**Mitchell:** That's the fourth leg of the chair that you're sitting on, Marcia. The community that we represent can create, as you heard mentioned at this podium, solutions for themselves. And we are going to work hand in sync with that community to make sure that we deliver the things that they say that they need, the things that they say that they want. And these men and women behind me are trained to deliver those resources into those neighborhoods where other people cannot go. So I'm proud to accept this opportunity. I'm looking forward to working with the other members of the administration and my colleagues. I'm looking forward to helping us strengthen the Crisis Management System. To expand on it, on its successes. I'm looking forward to working with all of you. Thank you.

[Applause]