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Media Information and Tools

5/19/2008

► News and Press Releases

- > News Articles/Stories
- > Press Releases
- > Older News Flashes

Publications and Resources

UWSEPA in Detail

Back To Home

United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania Presents a Public Forum to Address the Causes and Consequences of the “Stop Snitchin” Movement in Philadelphia

PHILADELPHIA, PA — With its long-standing commitment to improving the community and bettering the lives of youth for more than 80 years, the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania presents a public forum to address the Code of Silence and “Stop Snitchin” phenomenon in Philadelphia, where residents in crime-ridden communities are unwilling or afraid to cooperate with law enforcement officials to help bring violent perpetrators to justice.

On Friday, May 16 at 10am, the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, along with local community and civic leaders, will hold an important public forum at the Civic Space at WHYY studios addressing the causes and consequences of the growing Code of Silence in the city. While the “Stop Snitchin” campaign has received significant media attention in recent years, this forum presents an open and honest dialogue concerning the root causes of this behavior. The goal is to understand the deeper, systemic issues behind this phenomenon.

“To see the United Way providing a forum for an open dialogue into the root causes of this ‘Stop Snitching’ culture in Philadelphia is a step in the right direction towards helping to make our city a safer place to live,” says Mayor Michael A. Nutter.

With the thought-provoking thesis, *The Commonwealth v. Dwayne Brown: The Roots and Consequences of the Code of Silence in Inner City Philadelphia* by Samuel George, a local Stoneleigh Fellow, serving as a base of discussion, this public forum explores the genealogy of the Code of Silence in Philadelphia. In a thorough examination, George tracks the history behind the “Stop Snitchin” campaign, as well as how witness reluctance plays out in Philadelphia courtrooms. Based on hours of interviews with Philadelphia politicians, district attorneys, DHS leaders, defense attorneys, community members, and extensive research on the double homicide trial of Dwayne Brown, an accused drug dealer, George shines a light on the debilitating impact of the Code of Silence. This forum also brings together those affiliated with the controversial Dwayne Brown case in order to help expose the hidden agenda behind the “Stop Snitchin” culture.

“We are concerned that the root causes of this behavior are either not addressed or assumed to be so ingrained that there is no solution. We’d like to encourage a more nuanced consideration of the issues,” says David Fair, vice president for Community Impact for United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania.

From T-shirts to web sites, the “Stop Snitchin” campaign has grown despite efforts by police and community leaders to encourage residents to come forward with information regarding violent crimes in their area. For those who believe that this Code of Silence is a recent phenomenon fueled by hip hop culture, Samuel George is quick to point out a deep-seated historical connection.

“The easiest explanation for ‘Stop Snitching’ is the influence of tee-shirts and rap music. However, the Code of Silence has historical roots, and if we hope to repair the broken connection between the community and the police, we must consider the origins of the problem.”

There have been more than 100 homicides in Philadelphia so far this year, and last year saw a total of 392 homicide deaths in the city. While the district attorney's office doesn't keep statistics on how many criminal cases are dropped because of witness intimidation, nearly 50 percent of murders in Philadelphia went unsolved in 2007. Why are residents in communities plagued by violence so reluctant to cooperate with law enforcement officials? Many are pointing to the increasingly pervasive "Stop Snitchin'" culture. As the city of Philadelphia struggles to gain support from communities to solve gun violence, the fast growing "Stop Snitchin'" phenomenon is making law enforcers' ability to make communities safer even more difficult.

"The Code of Silence has a severe impact on Philadelphia's criminal justice system. It nurtures a mutual distrust between many inner city youth and police officers. Following years of turmoil, many see law enforcement as a hostile, dangerous force, and not as a security option," says George.

ADA Mark Gilson, a forum panelist, prosecuted the men responsible for the 2004 school-yard murder of 10 year-old Faheem Thomas Childs — a case that has come to epitomize the "Stop Snitchin'" phenomena. Despite the presence of dozens of possible eyewitnesses to the crime and over \$100,000 in reward money, no one stepped forward to speak up, and at the trial that followed Faheem's death, six witnesses who were called to the stand by the prosecution all recanted their testimonies.

"Overcoming the culture and influence of the 'Stop Snitching' movement is the single biggest obstacle facing police and prosecutors in the fight against violent crime in Philadelphia. It is a constant struggle to convince witnesses to step up and speak up when others are so quick to label them as being 'snitches,'" says ADA Gilson.

So why are those living in crime-ridden neighborhoods refusing to cooperate with police? Are they simply afraid, or do they not want to get involved? Are the influences of hip-hop culture fueling this brand of lawlessness, or do residents simply not trust the police? Is it an attempt by drug dealers and gangsters to intimidate witnesses, or is it a legitimate protest against law enforcers' over-reliance on self-serving criminal informers? Could it be that there's such strong animosity toward the police in some communities that even people who aren't afraid, and who hate crime, still feel cooperating is something good people don't do? Or is it bigger than that?

Philadelphia Deputy Mayor of Public Safety, Everett Gillison calls the "Stop Snitch'in phenomenon, "a cancer that this city cannot allow to eat away at the civility of our society. The whole culture not only impacts the justice systems but it impacts society. As citizens of society, we have a responsibility to one another. But 'Stop Snitchin' says mind your own business and puts us in a vulnerable space because we are no longer able to depend on each other. The city of Philadelphia is only as strong as its citizens. The need for police and the community to work together is crucial to the success and safety of our city."

With a diverse and expert panel, this forum openly examines the crippling short and long term impact of the "Stop Snitchin'" phenomenon, as well as plans for solutions that will help to repair the lack of trust between community residents and police. United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, with the support of community leaders and local sponsors, is committed to playing a more active role in the efforts to overcome violence in Philadelphia and believes that it is important to encourage more public discussion and debate on this delicate, yet vital issue.

ABOUT THE UNITED WAY OF SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Founded in 1921 by the business community, United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania improves people's lives by mobilizing the caring power of donors, volunteers and communities. United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania is one of the region's largest non-profit organizations and one of approximately 1,300 affiliated United Ways nationwide. Each United Way is independent, separately incorporated, and governed by local volunteers. Give. Advocate. Volunteer. www.uwsepa.org

ABOUT THE PANEL

Hon. Renee Cardwell-Hughes, Court of Common Pleas, First Judicial District Member, Pennsylvania Commission on Judicial Independence, Philadelphia

Judge Hughes, a trial judge with the Court of Common Pleas in the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania encompassing the city of Philadelphia, has served in the Trial Division since her appointment to the bench in 1995. In 1996 she was elected to a full 10 year term. Also in 1996, Judge Hughes was appointed to the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing where she chairs the policy

committee. Judge Hughes is also a member of the Board of Directors for The Sentencing Project which is working to reduce racial disparity in the criminal justice system.

Everett Gillison, Deputy Mayor for Public Safety

Gillison has spent the past 22 years as a public defender, representing some of Philadelphia's most notorious criminals. Recently appointed to the newly created position by Mayor Nutter as the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety, Gillison is now charged with developing new strategies for problems like youth violence and convicts' re-entry into society after prison. Gillison is also involved in setting up a 311 non-emergency call line, enlarging the city's network of surveillance cameras and expanding the Youth Violence Reduction Program.

Mark Gilson, Assistant District Attorney

One of the most regarded prosecutors in the city, Gilson has been with the Philadelphia District Attorney's office for 19 years. Born in Northeast Philadelphia, Gilson handles some of the city's toughest cases in the Homicide Unit where he's worked since 1992. He was the prosecutor in the Dwayne Brown double murder trial. Gilson also prosecuted the two gang members in the shooting death of little Faheem Thomas Childs in which "Stop Snitchin'" was a major factor.

George Mosee, Deputy District Attorney, Juvenile Division

Mosee has been the Deputy District Attorney in charge of the Juvenile Division of the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office since October 2002. The Juvenile Division includes the Juvenile Drug Treatment Court Program, Juvenile Prosecution Unit, Habitual Offender Unit, Child Support Unit and Youth Aid Panels. Mosee joined the office in 1988 and served in various units including Motions, Major Trials, Federal Alternatives to State Trials as a Special Assistant United States Attorney, Asset Forfeiture as Chief and the Dangerous Drug Offender Unit as Chief.

Darryl Coates, Philadelphia Anti-Drug/Anti-Violence Network (PAAN)

Coates is the executive director of PAAN. The goal of this non-profit organization is to promote community safety through services that help to reduce drug abuse and violence as well as assist at-risk youth to develop positive alternatives that will return them to a productive life in society. Coates is also the executive director of Nu Sigma Youth, a non-profit organization that strives to provide quality and positive alternatives for African American Youth.

Andre Chin, Institute for the Development of African American Youth

Born in Jamaica and raised in Philadelphia, Chin is a graduate of Temple University with a degree in Social Administration. He's a program director at the Institute for the Development of African American Youth (IDAAY), a community-based, non-profit organization, serving Philadelphia and Montgomery Counties. Chin runs Don't Fall Down in the Hood, a program within IDAAY that works with youth who face charges related to firearms, assault, theft, and narcotics.

Daniel Cariño, Youth Advocate, Congreso de Latinos Unidos

A North Philadelphia native, Cariño is a freshman at Temple University. He's also co-founder and current president of the Youth Advocacy Council at Congreso De Latinos Unidos, a predominately Hispanic non-profit community organization in Philadelphia. Cariño has also been appointed by City Counsel to serve as the delegate of the 7th District in the city's Youth Commission.

Samuel George, Stoneleigh Center Youth Fellow

George is a Stoneleigh fellow at the local Stoneleigh Center and author of *The Commonwealth v. Dwayne Brown: The Roots and Consequences of the Code of Silence in Inner City Philadelphia*. George's father, Paul George, was Dwayne Brown's attorney, and George interned at his father's law office during the Dwayne Brown trial.

Dorothy Johnson-Speight, Founder, Mothers in Charge and Forum Moderator

Dorothy Johnson-Speight's founded Mothers in Charge as a community advocacy and support organization for families affected by violence after her 24 year old son was murdered over a parking space in December 2001. The mission of Mothers In Charge is violence prevention, education and intervention for youth, young adults, families and community organizations. Mothers In Charge also works with elected officials on legislation to support safe neighborhoods and communities for children and families and collaborates with community and faith based organizations.

James Randolph, Deputy Commissioner, DHS Juvenile Justice Division

Randolph is the Deputy Commissioner of the Philadelphia Department of Human Services, Juvenile Justice Division, responsible for overseeing delinquent youth. He grew up in North Philadelphia.

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