

**Congressional Youth Violence Prevention Summit**  
**Remarks by Rashad Burns, Youth Leader**

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*Congressional Visitors Center, Washington DC*

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Hello, my name is Rashad Burns, I am currently a student in Potomac State College of West Virginia University. I would like to thank Representative Bobby Scott, Representative Nancy Pelosi, and other members of the House of Representatives Democratic Gun Violence Prevention Task Force for the opportunity to participate in this important panel.

**Rashad's Story:** Living in the Petworth area for my entire life, I feel as though I have a strong understanding for it. I have seen a major change in this neighborhood over the past 6 or 7 years. It has become increasingly violent a possible reason for this is the lack of communication between parents and youth combined with the negative influences in their neighborhoods. As a result it has made me and other young people have a certain sense of "heightened awareness" meaning everyone has to constantly look over their shoulder. However there are a few members of the community that give a reminder of how great that community can be. A few examples of this would be school programs and even organizations like the Latin American Youth Center and World Vision

who give youth the opportunity to be positive influences in the community showing how effective youth-adult partnerships can be.

**Share a personal experience:** I have seen and been a victim of youth violence more times than I can count. So much in fact, that when I hear about violence in the community it does not have the same shock that it usually would. I've heard of countless robberies and assaults almost every week before I graduated high school. These stories have ended up being something to expect, unfortunately.

**What advocacy/violence prevention program(s) have you participated in?:** I participated in the Youth Empowerment Program in my senior year while I was attending Roosevelt Senior High School. I actually joined the program after hearing about it from one of my classmates at Roosevelt and Daisy Martinez from the Latin American Youth Center. The other members of the program were an absolute pleasure to be with from the moment I started it. We talked and learned from each other, we discussed everything from the importance of seeking change, but something even more important, how we ourselves can act upon the change we desire and become the change. And on a more personal note the program changed the ways I thought of my neighborhood and more importantly the people in it, I believed what most believe. That their needs to be change yes, and

the way going about doing it was by putting more police into schools but I soon realized that this is not the solution to the problem, but rather just another suppression technique. I would rather focus my career and future on helping young people make good decisions and realize their dreams. That is what led me to change my major from criminal justice to social work or even psychology.

**Why are programs like this important?** They give the thought and idea that a young person has the power to have the impact, a positive impact on their community. Also they can partner with adults to make changes, which opens up the possibility to make changes not only for adults but for the youth as well.

**Why is the youth voice important in preventing violence and creating safer communities?** The youth voice in preventing violence is not simply important, it is necessary. We need to have both voices and opinions of the community, not one or the other. The youth are the main victims and the ones responsible for most of the violence in communities today. When youth can speak out on these issues, they are given a sense of power and responsibility which makes them realize that safer communities can only come through young people *being* the change.

**How can the government partner with communities to reduce and prevent violence?** The Youth PROMISE Act will provide communities with the resources

and support to develop prevention programs that work for youth. I hope that Congress will pass this important piece of legislation this year. Also, organizations like World Vision and the Latin American Youth Center who work directly with young people and communities can give the government the feedback necessary to provide strong prevention strategies and funding for programs to be more effective in reducing violence.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and share my story.