

This is how city can commit to preventing the next outbreak of deadly violence



BY JAY SCHENIRER
SPECIAL TO THE SACRAMENTO BEE

When did we start qualifying our horror at shootings according to the number of casualties? While we are still learning the details of the [mass shooting](#) that took place in downtown Sacramento on April 3, losing people to such violence is unacceptable in any number. In this case, six innocent individuals needlessly lost their lives.

Our emergency personnel did what they could to respond to the violence. They have a critical role to play in our city, and we value that role in ensuring public safety.

We cannot, however, be a city that only reacts to violence. Equally important is the need to prevent violence, which is not the primary responsibility of first responders. That work requires looking upstream and collaborating with multiple stakeholders to implement programs we know work to prevent young people from becoming victims or perpetrators of violence.

One positive step taken by the Sacramento City Council is to formally define public safety services as those provided by police, fire, emergency services and youth violence prevention programs. Decades of research show that programs that engage young people in positive youth development activities keep them off the streets and out of the backseats of police cars.

However, we have yet to spend as much on these kinds of programs as we do on the city's other public safety services. Given our city's track record of failing to invest in our youngest residents, we can no longer rely on mere promises made by elected officials. Youth services are typically the last to be funded and the first to be cut from the city's budget.

As I have said before, and as I've heard from my colleagues countless times, the city's budget reflects our values. That means that allocating city dollars to expand our programs for children and youths is a tangible indicator that prevention services are as critical as our other public safety services.

This is not a call to defund the police. Law enforcement and other first responders have a critical role to play in maintaining the public's safety, and they require resources to do so.

Last week, I brought a resolution before the City Council that would increase Sacramento's investment in youth-centered prevention services by a share equivalent to that of any increased investment in police, fire, emergency medical services and citywide emergency management when the city's annual operating budget is adopted. By approving this resolution, the City Council can put its money where its mouth is when it comes to what it truly takes to address violence in Sacramento.

I cannot and will not sit on the sidelines watching violent incident after violent incident take the lives of our residents. We've done enough talking. We need to make a radical shift in putting the same value on prevention that we do on intervention and reaction. Now is the time for that shift.

Councilman Jay Schenirer represents Sacramento's District 5, which includes Oak Park, Curtis Park and parts of South Sacramento.

