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City Council Passes Resolution to Address Childhood Trauma
Community members, advocates unite to curb the public health crisis

New Orleans, LA – Today, the New Orleans City Council called for an examination into how the city can better prevent and treat childhood trauma. The resolution, sponsored by Councilmembers Jason Williams, Helena Moreno, and Jay Banks, tasks the Orleans Parish Children and Youth Planning Board with making specific recommendations by August 1, 2019.

Children in New Orleans have rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder four times the national average, according to data from the Institute of Women and Ethnic Studies (IWES), which found that 46% of New Orleans youth show symptoms of lifetime PTSD; 53% have experienced the murder of someone close to them; and 18% have witnessed a murder.

“Untreated trauma is the underbelly of violence. The well-being of our children must be our first concern if we want to live in a safe and prosperous New Orleans,” said Dr. Denese Shervington, President and CEO of IWES, at today’s City Council meeting.

Trauma has been shown to cause a variety of negative health outcomes, both mental and physical, and can manifest in youth as aggression, violence, withdrawal, depression, and/or an inability to focus. These symptoms are often criminalized, especially when exhibited by children of color – who make up over 95% of the children arrested in New Orleans.

“When kids act out, they’re often perceived by adults as ‘being bad’ rather than as needing help,” says Rachel Gassert, Policy Director at the Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights. “The result is a trauma-to-prison pipeline that shuffles vulnerable children into the justice system, which further exacerbates their trauma.”

While effective treatment exists, it is often inaccessible in the community, particularly for poor children. There is a dearth of quality trauma-based services in New Orleans, and slashes in state funding have made them even scarcer.

“Most children in New Orleans are getting mental health care through Medicaid, but it’s not giving the kids what they need,” said Paulette Carter, Executive Director of the Children’s Bureau of New Orleans. “The model doesn’t emphasize quality, and reimbursements to providers are extremely low.”

This is the second resolution City Council has passed in the last few weeks dealing with childhood trauma. Renewed attention to the issue is the result of Nola.com | The Times-Picayune’s recent series The Children of Central City, which focused on a youth football team based in Central City that has lost 28 players to violence since 2003.

“I know what trauma is and that’s why I started coaching, so I could give love back to the kids, because I know in the streets there ain’t no love,” said Mr. Scott.
Mr. Scott called for additional resources for the Panthers team, and encouraged community members and city leaders to get involved in kids’ lives. Mr. Scott, his partner Domisheka Hankton, and Panthers players and families were honored in a proclamation by City Council.

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*The Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights acts as the juvenile public defender for Orleans Parish and a local and statewide advocate for children in the justice system.*