

## Episode 45: On the Front Lines



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**\*\*\*Brady legal music\*\*\***

### **Kelly**

Hey, everybody, this is the legal disclaimer where we tell you the views, thoughts and opinions share on this podcast belong solely to the person talking to you right now and not necessarily Brady or Brady's affiliates. Please know this podcast contains discussions of violence that some people may find disturbing. It's okay. We find it disturbing too.

**\*\*\*Brady musical introduction\*\*\***

### **JJ**

Welcome back to Red Blue and Brady for the third episode in our series on racial justice, gun violence and gun violence prevention. Now, in our previous episode, we talked about the history of racism and gun laws. But today we're exploring how racism intersects with the everyday gun violence we see across the country and efforts to prevent it. No matter what some people may want to believe, We know that racism is very real and still very present in the United States. And today Kelly and I will be talking to Mr. Clayton Rosenberg of the Alliance of Concern Men and

Women, a nonprofit organization that focuses on saving the lives of at risk youth and adults in areas of Washington DC that experience high amounts of gun violence.

We'll be exploring how that violence is intertwined and complicated by racism, gentrification and policing, as well as the alliance's work as violence interrupters. Then in our "unbelievable but" section I'm telling you all about what happens when you alter a toy gun to shoot real bullets. No, really. Finally, in our news wrap up, recovering everything from murderers to lack of political attention.

Thanks for being here, everybody. Let's jump into it.

**\*\*\*music plays\*\*\***

**JJ**

So as Kelly and I have said a bunch now, one of the things we're trying to do so hard with this podcast series is to uncover and shed some light, you know, in our own little way on how gun violence and race intersect. And we can't just talk about this in an academic or theoretical sense. We need to talk about this in terms of the people who were doing this work on the ground. So for that, really, I think I'm just gonna be quiet and let Mr. Rosenberg talk. So, Kelly Clayton, would you both mind introducing yourself to our listeners?

**Kelly**

Hi, everyone. I'm Kelly Samson. I'm an attorney here at Brady, where I focus on our constitutional litigation, legal alliance and racial justice work.

**Clayton Rosenberg**

Hello, everyone. I am Clayton Rosenberg. I'm the chief of staff for the Alliance of Concerned Men and Women, and I am on the front line.

**JJ**

You definitely are. The people in your organization most definitely are, and so I think we have to start off with, if you could just give me, it's a long history at the Alliance for Concerned Men and Women. But if you could give, like a brief history.

**Clayton Rosenberg**

The Alliance of Concerned Men started in 1991, our founder's son was murdered in Crystal Skating Rink, outside of Crystal Skating Rink, And he used to be, ah, famous rapper in D. C. Named Fat Ronnie. Once that occurred, you know, our founder and a group of five friends got together and said, this violence must end because hit home. So they got together and went into one of the worst neighborhoods in D. C. One of those neighborhoods at the time was Benning Terrace. Benning Terrace is also known as Simple City.

Now, at this time, this was considered the most dangerous area in Washington, D. C. And you had a group of five individuals that say they can end this violence in that community. They began going there constantly you know, time and time again. You know, the people pushing

them out saying don't come here. But the consistency, the perseverance and just being, you know, true and wanted to really see transformation in the neighborhood. They were able to broker a lot of truth, especially between the circle and avenue with the help of DC Housing Authority by providing the young men and women who was once beefing with each other a sustainable job to clean up their community and become productive citizens. After that occurred, we pretty much went all over the city and brokered truce to all of the most dangerous neighborhoods, you know. And how we do truce it's a five level truce.

There's one the community got to say, it's a truce. Two community based organizations have to say it's a truce. Three Police have to say it's a truce. Four the gang's itself have to say it's a truce, and then five, the news have to say it. And once all those five pillars are completed, then that's when we accomplished real truce in that neighborhood. So where we can hold them accountable and it can hold themselves accountable for, you know, stopping violence. So at this time in D. C, when anything was, you know, the homicide rate was 488, 489 per year. It was up in that target range. And, you know, in 2012 we got it down to 88 you know, and at that time we had over 600 that was interrupted, like in the community. And don't work now. And, you know, we're just pushing over 200 with the reset him everything. So you've just been on the front line able to broker a truce and create conflict resolution throughout all D. C and helping them understand that, you know, they life matter, that they can do more than survive, they can start living. And there were gonna be with them every step of the way.

And even when they get to the point of transformation, going to still be there on call, just in case they need it because we know it's hard, you know, it's difficult. It can be challenging. But you know what? All challenges you can complete. So that's how we would come from it from that angle been on the front line of work.

### **Kelly**

Why are each of the five components of the pillar kind of important to achieving a truce?

### **Clayton Rosenberg**

For us? We see that you can't... perception versus reality. We like to start from. So the perception is once the community says it's a truce it's over, it's done. But where's the accountability behind the perception? So we like to look at the reality of everything. So the reality is that once we accomplished the five pillars, then the accountability is there and we gotta have accountability through all of these neighborhoods and, you know, we're dealing with at risk, high risk individuals. And if we're dealing with people like that, we have to make sure and be able to understand the value behind what they just signed, the value behind what they just did for the community, because we all want to live in a safe community and even the ones that are doing certain things.

They want to live in a safe community also, but they're in survivor mode. And when you're in survival mode, you always think something's gonna occur. So you always almost you're paranoid and we figure, if we can get these people to start living and not worrying about you know, the next person coming to get your things like that, then we've done our job. And we can really say that a truce has been accomplished because those five pillars, you know, anytime they see their

own face in the newspaper like you know, you just did something amazing. You did a truce between, you know, rival neighborhoods and you all on the front line. You could see it. So that's what we wanted, take pride. And actually, you know something that's gonna benefit the entire community in the long run.

**JJ**

Well, and that's something that I think it's so interesting in The DC context is that it's neighborhood gangs. It's not these, like big, monolithic, US-wide gangs, it's their smaller and more insular. But that doesn't mean that they don't have a deep impact on people's lives.

**Clayton Rosenberg**

That's exactly right. We have the neighborhood crews. That's what we call it, because we don't do the major gangs, Bloods, Crips, MS-13. We don't do anything of that nature. But we do understand that these crews can sometimes even be bigger because you know you back in the nineties were like the ash crew you have all these new crew even Benning Terrace was formerly known as Simple city, you know. So all of these neighborhoods begin to embrace these names and begin to embrace the neighborhood like they take pride and like they have ownership in it, because that's where they were born and raised, they almost got to be a certain way. You know, when you're born in a certain predicament, if you're you're born around the neighborhood that's used to doing a lot of violence, and you naturally have to adapt to be doing violence, right?

And that's how the whole, I guess, perception behind what they're trying to accomplish in the neighborhoods and with, why they take it so personal. This has been shaping DC with these neighborhoods, and now we know that it's been causing a lot of confrontation, especially in the neighbors that's not used to violence. You know, if something occurs and then with social media, something occurs and you may be said something on somebody's live. But, you know, maybe you were joking. But we all know, every joke got some truth in and based upon that perception now you just got a beef between your neighborhood and that neighborhood all over something that happened on social media.

And nowadays the beefs get taken to the extreme, you know it gun violence becomes a point where they're gonna do something. And you know, you have to have your protection on you. If you if you wanna say something of that nature because it's gonna end up, you know, being, to the point where innocent people is gonna be, you know, end up getting across five because a lot of them, they don't know how to deal with conflict by verbally or or coming to the table to handle situations with conflict resolution. They like to take it because they got access to a weapon, I'm going to use the weapon. And the fact that they don't value their own lives and they don't value a human being's life. That's where we have to get to the root because the valuing of one's life isn't at the forefront anymore. Because of so many different traumas and triggers, that's been occurring in the community over years. Over time. That a lot of them don't care anymore. So that's what we're really trying to focus on making sure that they understand that. You know, we care, You know, we care for you all. We care for a community.

We understand that. You know, you made some mistakes. We forgive. Can you forgive yourself?

## **Kelly**

So in terms of perception and reality, could you just talk a little bit about some of the perception that people might have about some of the neighborhoods that have the most violence and the reality of life in that neighborhood and also the reality of people there and the things that they value or the dreams that they have for their life versus what people may think about them from the outside.

## **Clayton Rosenberg**

Yah, so. When you talk about neighborhoods we are in right now, we work in a cure violence initiative. We are in two of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Washington DC Benning Terrace again, aka a simple city is what they call it. We don't like to frame it that way. Cause we think they're so much better. But it can go for different phrases. And then Washington Highlands. Now, when you're in these two communities, you understand that if the community has 1000 people there, maybe there may be only 15 people terrorizing. But because those 15 people have a pulse on that community, it seems like the whole community is bad. It seems like the whole community is condoning those types of activities, which is not the case.

And every community you almost have like a pat. You have some folks that have just likes to pile up in all these pieces. You have some folks that are doing, you know, selling. Let's say that they're doing drugs and you have some folks that regular folks, that they're gonna work then coming home every day that they're taking care of family. They, you know, doing stuff for the community, helping the neighbors out. Going to the ACM meetings. You know, these are the bulk of the entire neighborhood, But because of those 15 individuals, it gets shaped as a bad place. Terrible place. Don't move around there. These people are gonna terrorize you. These people are not gonna allow you to, you know, be successful and put you down. That's what people think. Then that's the perception that goes on. But the reality is, there's so many good people in these neighborhoods, but a lot of them are not on section eight. A lot of them just, you know, they want an affordable place, which we all do right, and they rather live there because that's something that grew up around, so they are able to handle certain situations.

But you know, these folks want peace. They want a safe community and they want to feel recognized as a whole because they understand that even though these 15 individuals or so are doing the bulk of the work, there's still so many great people in the neighborhood that are willing to go above and beyond to make sure the neighborhood is safe. But they're dealing with so many outside entities that they don't know what I saw, like they don't know how to even begin to transform the neighborhood themselves. But that's when we come in to teach them how and to teach them to own a neighborhood, to let them know that a lot of the stuff that's occurring and is not making it safe no more. We're not going for that. We're not gonna allow that to continue, we're gonna be on the front line. We're gonna let these folks know that we're here for them.

So we on call 24/7. You call us anytime of the day. And that's how the neighborhood should feel that they got someone that they can call 24/7 that's able to handle certain situations that doesn't lead to incarceration or doesn't lead to someone getting killed at least a real conflict resolution to where be able to transform these individuals life. So take them out of that community, but bring them back as a totally new person that's trying to provide and be that that pillar for the

community, because a lot of our people that we have on our team were once in that same predicament. But now look at these individuals transform their lives and they are on the front line now, trying to transform the rest of the guys lives.

**JJ**

I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about sort of what the day to day job is of a man or a woman who's a violence interrupter in their community or in the communities that the Alliance of Concern Men and Women are working in.

**Clayton Rosenberg**

Yes indeed. So as the violence interrupted, these individuals are on the front line. They go in the nooks and crannies of different neighborhoods, and they speak to the at risk, high risk individuals on the front line and they try to mediate conflicts. So they are the ones that can go into these places because they once were from these individual neighborhoods, so they are not too far removed. So they have some sense of credibility in that neighborhood and in the neighborhood, and they are able to talk to these people and let them know, Hey, you know, this isn't right. This should not be occurring. And what can we do to help you not do anything that's damaging to the community? Because when a community hurts, then people live in fear.

And if people living afraid, a community is not going to progress, and if that community is not progressing, what's going to end up eventually happens like it always does. It's gonna be, you know, put on the demolition list to be the next community that's out because you did little public housing. You know, all they're looking for a reason too, it was like we wasted money. We put all this money into building it. But then, you know, once it occurs that you know individuals are just violent and it's not that many. Then we tear it down and just build it back up again. Why is that? Money could be going to so many other things. So many other things were resources that could be going to so many other areas. But because we're dealing with these things where people don't feel like they're included they don't feel like they got a say in what's going on. I'll let them know. Hey, you do, and I'm gonna connect you with our outreach worker and our outreach worker is gonna get you connected to resources that you can have to transform your life. Whether you want to go back to school, whether you need a job.

Rather, you know, these are the things that you know. We're looking at other community partners and stuff, like to where we can connect these individuals. We gotta individual have been through our program that has been transformed. We've got to be able to give this individual accomplishment or a bonus or something to say, you know what? We thank you. And guess what? Some, it sounds small. But the job is what a lot of these individuals want and need, but not just a job. We're gonna have that mental peace, where we're gonna be with them every step of the way. Even when you know, after the first two weeks after the first month, first 90 days, we're always gonna be gonna call. We're gonna be there because we know some for some of these people it's their first job ever. And when you're working a job, you don't know the ends and you don't know how to do what, you know how to be job ready. But that's why we are here. We're gonna help these people understand, and then begin that hold the transformation in peace because even our people that we have in the front line, because they not so far removed, removed from that area, they were once high risk and some of are still high risk, but they decided in their

heart and soul that they're going to do something to change other people in the neighborhood life that a little bit more, you know, all from from them. They're not really at their level of transformation, but they're willing.

**JJ**

I just to me it's that you go into neighborhoods often talking individuals who are armed or at the very least, neighborhoods when there's been a lot of firearm related violence and you all don't have weapons, you just have. I mean, they're very nice jackets. You just have your red and black jacket sort of announce who you are. But you know, these are neighborhoods where a lot of times the police don't even go or is it? I heard you say that if they do go, they go with 100 members and all of their extra equipment, and they go for the purposes of a raid, not for sort of community engagement.

**Clayton Rosenberg**

Yeah, and that's the key. It's like for us. We have no bulletproof vest. We have no guns. We have nothing, no pepper spray. We're going there with just the spirit of transformation. Why? We believe that if the neighborhood sees us and we feel safe because we're from those types of communities and we can relate. So we go in there with the real genuine heart and they understand they know what's real and what's fake like they've been. They've been lied to so many times that they can pick out a fake in a quick instance. So for us, our job is to make sure that we can relate to them and get them to a level where they could begin to understand where we're coming from. And once that occurs, we begin to do surgery.

That's what we do. We do surgery and fix these individuals. And one thing we found out that even when the police are involved and the police are in certain neighborhoods, maybe they were on the same block and in the same alley where a shooting just occurred, but for some reason it's not connected to where the community doesn't feel safe even when the police is there. It's like something got occurred any time that the community is reaching out to us for safety and we come in with just, you know, our spirit and having training in how to deal with this, but they have all of these different tools and access to them and nothing is getting done or no murder has been solved. You know, we begin information from the community.

The community will call us when there's a shooting, the community will call us when there's a stabbing. The community calls us, they don't call the police. They call the police if it gets to a point where it's heavy, as police eventually will end up, you know, coming to the scene but in the on site in the beginning, they want us to be there because of how we deal with certain situations. But we understand that we're not superheroes. You know, we're putting our lives on the line because we believe that each individual life in the community matters, and we understand that a lot of them are going to different traumatic situations, a lot of them are dealing with so many different traumas, right? And they don't have the guts, the secret sauce to the solutions, the secret sauce to the problems that I'm dealing with. I know that I just got triggered. I'm triggered by so many things because I'm paranoid because I'm living in survival mode. But no one ever told me how to calm myself down and deal with these issues from just the beginning standpoint. How do I do it? They don't know. But that's when we came in and we began to transform their lives.

## **Kelly**

Can you talk about the difference between living and surviving and what that looks like? And how do you all work with people to help them get there?

## **Clayton Rosenberg**

Yes indeed. So when you're surviving. You are always paranoid. You are always on the, you're just always having the feeling that something is going to occur to gonna happen so something is gonna happen to you now, rather, that's in your community. Rather, that's when you walk in the neighborhoods. You're on a train, but you're in survival mode. So if you need to eat, you need to survive. You're gonna take it, you're gonna take it. So if you have a weapon and you have the means to get something, that's what you're gonna do because you're in survival mode. You don't know you're not thinking about education, you're not thinking about another person you're thinking about, how can you survive today because you feel like your life is in danger each time you wake up--that's survival.

But when you live where you live, you have compassion for your brother and sister. You have compassion for your neighborhood. You have compassion and and really you have love for each other. You love yourself. Why are a lot of them not living like that? You understand that things are a process. You don't take things personal. And then you look for help. You look for resources, you look for ways that you, you know better your life, but better your community also. Because it becomes now, instead of being selfish in survival mode, you become selfless. Now the folks that are selfless out of one's has been transformed, understands that it's time for them to live. They can't live the life in fear. You know they can't live like that. Even when the shooting occurred, we go right on the same block on the same spot where an individual just been shot and we stand there and let the community know you will not be living in fear. We're not gonna allow you to live in fear.

This is your neighborhood. This is your community. These are your people. We're gonna make sure that you understand: we are here and we are on the front line and we're gonna let the shooters know, we're not taking it anymore, So we're gonna be right there. And if they want to do something, you see us, right? But but we come from the standpoint of not been, you know, arrogant or out there. But being, we live in for greater purpose. We're living to really change individuals lives because it could be any of us can be any of our siblings. We don't want it to hit home. So we feel like we got to make sure that it doesn't affect anybody else either. So that's why we have the hope that we can transform.

## **JJ**

So this podcast in particular this episode is running as part of a larger series that the podcast is doing that it's sort of demonstrative of what Brady is trying to do, which is so like talk about racial justice, to talk about inclusivity, to talk about social justice more broadly and all across the board, like in all of our projects. But one of the things that and this might be me reading into it, but when I see that DC cuts funding to violence interrupters that the funding that is out there predominantly goes to government offices. That D. C. Spends a lot of money on things that are tied to gentrification, like, you know, having really good cameras for people running red lights or for speeding.

But they're not then maybe putting that money into doing things like improving schools and impacted communities or providing therapy to like violence impacted communities. Do you think that there's a racial component of that and that you know, as DC has gone from being like a predominantly black city to being a city that, like, rapidly, what I've heard from everybody is that like, there are just sort of white neighborhoods that pop up overnight that like drive up the cost of living and that don't interact with the old quote unquote DC?

**Clayton Rosenberg**

Yes, yes, and yes. So one thing we have to demand is that the money be put back into the community from all these other entities. So, for instance, you know, you brought up one of the important things like the speed cameras in D. C. Everybody notices so many speed cameras around D. C. and that has generated \$90 million last year. Now, out of that 90,000,00, one of the cameras in actually, Southeast area.

**JJ**

Which is really expensive for people who are unfamiliar with D. C. and are not getting the picture. This is sort of the place where there is, like a Lululemon and a Starbucks every three feet.

**Clayton Rosenberg**

Yes, and that's exactly how it is. I mean, one of the cameras literally produced \$11 million by itself. Can you imagine? But that's the reality that we're dealing with, right? And DC people don't realize that DC has the fourth highest incarceration rate in the nation. This is the nation's capital, and we have the fourth highest incarceration rate. And if the homicides keep going up because last year it was 166 homicides in 2017 it was 160. That means, I mean, for me that looks like we're not making good progress. No. Even though they finally decided to invest into this violence interrupting work because the numbers went up, things aren't looking how they should, and I think.

We have to hold all of our government officials accountable for that. Because when you have people that are trying, not even trying, they are doing the work like on the front line and letting these communities know where the police won't even go. That this is not right. We're not gonna take it. This needs to stop. We need to transform this or we need to find another resource to help these individuals out. Another platform to give these and let them feel inclusive. Let them understand if some new pretty buildings and new communities are popping up, guess what? Let them help build it. Give them opportunity to live in the community you think they want to live in in certain violent infested plague areas? No these individuals, just like I mentioned before, have the same amount of decency and respect of anybody else in the city, but they just live in a certain area. A lot of these individuals are not on section 8, a lot of these individuals just live in public housing, that's just what their circumstances have led them to. But if they had the same exact opportunity, would they be in the same predicament?

And I think the answer is no because I'm a true believer that cause I transform myself, you know, banned from them same communities and then just have an opportunity to go to school and go

overseas. And you know these things with I didn't think that was possible growing up, you know, I didn't like, put forth an effort to say, You know what? I can actually go to school or that was the last thing on my mind and and it eventually got me more open and an understanding on how to maneuver my own life and what type of respect I should have for my own life from the type of value I should have. Because if I didn't volunteer and get to see other parts of the city, I probably would still be in my same neighborhood to this day. And but because I decided to do something else, you know, if nobody else will go in a community, I will. That's how ACM really emphasized the Benning Terrace, because they asked him, how come y'all listen to ACM and nobody else? They said, because nobody else came.

So we always think that other people are going to be on their front line and other people's gonna be willing to sacrifice. But it's not that that's not the case. A lot of these individuals and on a lot of different programs is not as what you perceive it is. And that's why we got to really look at that perception versus reality mindset and or too because it is a too, you know, some sometimes the perception to say things, things are smooth things are good and everything's everyone's happy. But the reality is, you go in the neighborhood, people are miserable. People are struggling. People can't even provide for the family. That's when the reality will end up costing a lot in the long run. And that's, you know what's been happening.

## **JJ**

What strikes me about just on the funding end of things is that all of the violence interrupters in DC are pulling from a very small, like \$8 million pot, right? So, and that goes to like the mayor's office, too, and the, um, district attorney's office and what not. One traffic camera generates more income than the city is willing to, it seems, to pay for this important work, and that's got to be incredibly frustrating.

## **Clayton Rosenberg**

It is ridiculous. The city receives so many good accomplishments, like triple A rating this. We're doing good with the budget. We're doing all these amazing things. But where's that money going in the reality of all. Cause there's still communities suffering. There's still communities under siege. There's still communities that need help. They need something. They don't think the government care about them, they don't think people care about them. And anytime you're this close to the White House and people are living in fear, that's when you know there's a major problem. Because we have to be able to understand that this city, and hopefully soon to be the 51st state. You know, shaking on it, praying on it.

If we are able to control more, I'm hoping that we understand the responsibility that we have and that we owe to our people. Because these people have to understand for all this to occur, if this is going to be the 51st state, let's be the example of the nation. Let's be the best state and lead by example because we have all the resources. We're not putting all the resources where they need to be, but maybe if we had more autonomy on certain things then we can really control the outcomes of certain things like budget line items and things like that. Because it's not hard. It's challenging but it's not hard. You can always accomplish a challenge because each challenge is just an obstacle in the way for now. But you can complete a challenge. We have to emphasize that and muscle our city representatives and let them know hey we need you all. We need you all

to step up. If we are going to put our lives on the line and go into these communities which y'all are not willing to go to. Understand that we need to hire more violence interrupters, we need to have more outreach workers.

We need to make sure that the community has more funding to do certain events. Let's make them love again but it's going to start with getting them the real resources and not just looking for window dressing but actually doing the work.

**JJ**

Or not just putting more money into prisons.

**Clayton Rosenberg**

Hey now. That's the main thing because we see prison isn't the answer. If we have the fourth highest incarceration level in the United States. But just last year it went up on homicide rates. So that goes to show you were locking individuals up, but the homicide rate is still going up. So obviously the incarceration not working, because when you take usually how it goes if you take one person that was out of community, that was once leading or, you know, leading in that, that that whole whole community, you take one out, you're gonna create three more. So because you're not dealing with the structure of things, you're not dealing with the things that the root cause.

You think. Okay, I took one person. I was good. But remember, there's about 15 individuals, right? And that one individual that you took out was the only like my like minded individual that can understand that it's not not decent, but they are just doing it to survive. But the other ones that get into power now they don't care about none of that. They do whatever they want because they can and they got the opportunity to because they have the weapon. And that's when the root cause, now it gets to a serious point to we're trying to figure out what to do next, right? We know what to do. But if we can't provide no resources. And we just go in this community and we're saying, you know, y'all just do this. You just do that. We're gonna make something happen.

We put our lives on the line by looking foolish because we don't have the resources to help these individuals like is only so much you can do is only so much that you can do with nothing. And that's what we've been doing.

**JJ**

Policing is one of, I think, the easiest ways to conceptualize the government or the state sort of mishandling situations and mishandling communities.

**Clayton Rosenberg**

So when it comes to policing in Washington, D.C. Our budget for MPD, just the Police department here, Metropolitan Police Department, it's \$500 million. Now, out of that \$500 million, they get fancy cars, they get new weapons, they get all these things. And I ask myself, how many homicides have they solved? How many of these violent incidents are they solving to be able to continue to get increases in their budget because the real work going comes from the

ground, not sitting in the cars, not sitting around the neighborhood just showing presence, but actually being out. Even before.

We need police officers to be taught in conflict resolution so they can be able to go into these communities and talk to the residents normally. Where is not like a sign of fear. It's a sign of respect, a sign that we understand your person of authority. But we respect you because you're real and you're gonna come here and you won't let us know what's going on. We used to have that back in the days like officer friendlies, things like that. But as administration changes all this, you know, new stuff comes the criteria and agenda of DC changes right? Now we have, you know, different police chiefs. We have different administration. And their agenda might not be to be that, you know, I guess to have that relationship with the residents that they served, you know, they want to keep it out on a level of authority. You're not. But neither. This city is so passionate. These individuals will love to know who's protecting a community. You know, when the police are around this stuff. But everything is no transparency...like, we need to know if you saw the murder, we need to make it like, let it be known, blast it. Let them know you are coming because people think they can keep getting away with it. And the police are not solving anything. They won't keep doing the work.

But if the police come out and say we just solve this murder, we you know this person has been charged with X, Y and Z then guess what? The people doing the killing got to be more cautious now. Now they gotta rethink before they are about to do something. But if they keep everything in house and secretive and not letting us know what's going on and that's going to cause a ripple effect where all of these shooters and stuff, they're gonna keep doing the suits and they're gonna keep thinking they can get away with it. No mass, no nothing. Just straight shooting up everything. And that's when we got a real problem. Because if police can't solve these murders and and for us, we're on the front lines. So we know some things that the police know, too. And we know that the police know who the shooters are and they still allow these individuals to walk the streets. They still allow these individuals to keep doing it. So then it comes to, do they want these individuals to eliminate each other? You know, is that like the root cause? Do we do they want these individuals to keep, you know, killing one another and really having this community live in fear? What? What do they get out of it in the long run?

**JJ**

Or is it something else? But there's no communication and no trust on either side, so there can't be a conversation of we know we can't do anything for X, Y and Z reason. If people can bring us X, Y and Z, then we can do it. But when there's such a power dynamic and such a lack of trust, neither side feels safe. But one side has the power of the state behind and the other one is disenfranchised.

**Kelly**

I find it really striking to hear you talk about the work that you all are doing, where the only thing you're armed with is your jacket and the spirit of transformation, and you're going into neighborhoods and people trust you all to keep them safe, because this is not necessarily just DC specific, but one of the things that we see when we have incidents of police violence is people will say or officers will say, I feared for my life. I feared for my life, even though they're the

ones who have the training, supposedly and the fancy weapons that you mentioned in the cars, and yet because of the credibility that you all have, you actually can go into a situation. You said. Sometimes it's not even, you know over yet, with no arms, but not handle it in a violent manner because of the training and the skills that you all have.

### **Clayton Rosenberg**

Yes, and then that's what training is important. I think any time that you can allow someone to become an officer of law in six months or less, then you have a problem. That's scary where somebody can literally get a gun. No, no real conflict resolution skills and go out and say I'm a police officer. Then you gotta respect me as such. And they can, you know, really have that power to demand you too. And it's like, six months? But yet every other position, even in this work, before I even got to a position where I could begin to, understand that perspective, it was at least over a year and a half because because it's continuation work where you got to continue to get training, you gotta understand conflict resolution. You gotta then put that theory to test. You gotta go and evaluate. You know, all of these different components.

But any time I can say I get a gun and in six months I'm an officer and then you fear for your life. I wonder why? You have no training. You know you have no real training. You they don't teach you in the police academy how to talk to the community. That's one of the things that needs to be on the bucket list if you want these interviews to go. And they said they were afraid we have nothing and we're not scared. We're going in these communities with nothing and yet the same communities that y'all fear, as as officers were going in there with nothing at all. But we understand, like I don't blame the officers.

Yeah, I don't have the training, but that's when we come in as community based organization. We can train you on how to deal with frontline individuals that are high risk that are at risk and how to talk to the community as a whole. How to build better relationships in the community. If you want to know something about anything, maybe you got a community person, that you're a go to person. You help provide, help, help get groceries. Sometimes you know things like that be a community person because you live in these communities too. That's something some officers live in the worst communities, but yet they are blind to it, they blind to what's going on because they don't want to deal with that. It's like you can't, you can't have your cake and eat it so you can like you have to be held accountable just like everybody else. But we understand I need more training. The government got invested in the organization that's been doing the work and have the history of it that we can train you on how to do if we're able to do it from five men going into the worst community with nothing just off the spirit, then obviously they got a blueprint or something because they was able to change the worst community in D.C. And even to this day we are in these communities like we have a model, right?

Let us come and we got a model that separates it's called the BVIF program. We used to have beef stand for beliefs, values, imagery and fears. So we spell it BVIF, beef, right? So because of that, that whole program is about the transformation. What are the beliefs of this community? What are the values that they had? The things that they hold to the heart? But what is the imagery? How do they see themselves? Do they have empathy for one another? Do they see themselves as enemies. Do they see the rest of the people as enemies? Do they see you as an

officer as the enemy? And then what are their fears? Are they fearing you as an officer? Are they fearing their next door neighbor because they think they might do something? Are they fearing family members? Like we have to get to the root cause of all of these different just perspectives to understand: Okay, maybe something more needs to be done. Let's be the model for the country. Let's train our officers and have these offices doing real work. Let's have them understand conflict resolution, let's have them communicating with the neighbors walking around the neighborhood like all these officers.

Every officer should have a tour of duty in the neighborhood. Just walking around. Just talking to the neighbors, going to the community rec centers. Just being, uh, being a person to where they see that could come talk to don't be intimidated if you're intimidating they won't come talk to you. If you want information and you want things to be handled in a certain way, be that police officer that everybody sees. Because one thing is for sure, you got a gun, they're gonna respect you. Just off the fact that you got a weapon. But just because they respect you for that fact that doesn't mean they are not going disrespect you, because of who you are and what you stand for, but.

## **JJ**

I think that comes back though again to the power of money, though, too, because it's like so of that 500 million, that's in the budget. How much are you spending on weapons when maybe again, that goes into training that could go into raising salaries because I think that's you know, as you've pointed out, you know, cops in DC don't make that much money. So many view it as, ah really hard, dangerous, thankless job, which I think then leads to people who are scared with a chip on their shoulder. So pay more money, attract people who are really into it, for you know, not just the right reasons, but who like feel that their time is valuable. Get community liaisons like this. Add more people in from the community that you pay on and then maybe you switch then from like a militarized police force to like community policing. Which works.

## **Clayton Rosenberg**

And it does. It's been proven that it works. Community policing that, and that's pretty much where we are. We are at a point where in DC it's no way, expect. And I think, what this win it with any model or any city that brings up a component. If you're in a certain community and in that community liaison and people in the community telling you, hey, we should we should do this, listen to the people. Listen to the people cause it's okay to bring outside models into DC to help shape certain agendas or things like that.

But the same models are here already with organizations that have been doing the work for a long time, but if you think that an outside model can help when you are willing to invest money in the outside models than to invest into the organization that's here already. That's a disrespect to the organization that's been doing the work and and putting their lives and livelihood on the line. And then it just goes to show you how much we really want real change when we can't even look within to create that change? Because it's here already. But we gotta invest more into our folks here, because even okay, we say, let's say Francis, the police now say OK, yeah, we want to get trained in conflict resolution. They'll look outside before looking inside, you know, they're gonna look for an outside entity that they can bring in to pay to teach them.

The thing is that when we talk about violence and and when we talk about individuals from certain neighborhoods being affected, the ones that are making the rules never looked like the ones in the community. They are never at that table. That's the part that really needs to change. I don't understand how you can be making rules for somebody you don't know how they are living. Like you're not gonna bring no one from that community, even to the table. To tell you, okay, maybe not that that's wrong. We'll tell you all that now. We think we should do it another way, but they're not even invited to the table. So you got people that don't look like them people that that's not from them type of communities, making the rules for these individuals every day on what should happen or what they think should shape how it should be. That's where you got injustice. If you have nobody from that community or somebody that can relate to that community on a personal level at that table, then you're doing injustice. And now you're just doing window dressing because the real root of the cause is not being met because you're not dead. You don't know what's going on. And then people are intelligent. Some of them run in multi-million dollar businesses right? On the block.

But yeah, these interviews are not invited to the table to say, you know what I think this is happening because I saw X, Y and Z and I got experience in doing this, and I'm telling you, this will definitely benefit the city, and this will benefit the neighborhood. They never look within. They always try to do outside things because it looks better, right? But when you got real passionate divisions, they're gonna fight it. They're going to say why you bring in an outside source when we've been fighting for this forever. Try to get something here, but you're not investing in us. You're gonna invest in somebody else to come through training to come to all these sorts of occasions. When you got individuals here, that can do all of those things, too. And that's been doing it that's been proven to do it the right way. That's that haven't been, you know, showing or anything like that. But because it's a washer, is somebody that's already here. You don't you don't like it, but you see it in certain models we're looking at Oakland. It's homegrown. They are doing stuff from people from within Oakland. How come we can't take the same thing? It's like something's not adding up.

### **Kelly**

Um, at the height of the alliance's numbers, it sounds like there were about 600 violence interrupters working, and now you have about 200. So for those of us who might not be from the neighborhood or have credibility but are in DC and care about neighborhoods, what can we do to help the alliance in the work that you're doing?

### **Clayton Rosenberg**

Yes, so are in the city there were 600, there were many different groups, but the city in a total had over 600 violence interrupters from different organizations, Incredible Messengers and things like that. But right now, as the entire city, there's only 240. For us, we have 22 violence interrupters, you know, that goes to show you where and how the city has changed. And you know what are certain priorities in our city are. There's more life being blown into the work because they see how important it is and how much of a benefit it is for the city, for Washington D.C. Having a safer community right? It's a beautiful city.

But if you have certain areas that's not experiencing or not being inclusive in those beautifications then you're gonna eventually it's gonna eventually affect the other areas right? So that's why we try to get in that perspective on that front line and let them know that hey, you know, if we can can help everybody in our community understand and value their lives and value their brother and sister lives and value the per just human rights, Then we would be able to begin that transformation. But as far as what everyone else can do, I think from the standpoint of that everyone has a role. We all know it takes a village to raise a child nowadays, it takes a group of villages to shape and transform an entire community, and a group of villages can be individuals that are on the front line like my organization is on the front line.

But then there's a lot of individuals that sometimes your front line work, maybe going to testify in front of the council. You know your frontline work, maybe writing the council, right? Going to your AC meetings demanding that something be done to keep your community safe, demanding that people take the same amount of responsibility as they do the other wards and other neighborhoods that there seemed like nothing ever happens. They need to take the same amount of responsibility for your entire ward, you know, because we can't have a beautiful city, but on one side of the city and I always like to use this. It's called the tale of two cities in D.C. So the tale of two cities is you have one side of the city that people know as D.C. That people come here and the tourists and people like and they love and they look at it and all DC is amazing, but then the side that they don't see that almost considered the dark side right? Where there are shootings going on every other day that there's people really losing their lives and the community doesn't look the same as it looked uptown or as it looked in a certain area, D. C. It's a totally different perspective. And when you take a step back and look at these tales of the two city in one major city, you understand that something has to be done, especially if we're gonna have this reputation as the nation's capital, and we're gonna have this reputation as that type of entity then we need to put on that type of decency and respect on each ward and understand that all of our people, regardless of shape, color, size if you are in Washington, DC and you're living and you're trying to understand how to live life in DC and maneuver. Then you need to be safe, and you need to understand that safety is attainable for whatever you want to do.

Because you are a citizen here and and you need the respect and decency of the government to know that one killing is too many. One shooting is too many. Anything that occurs in your neighborhood. Step up, talk about it. Talk to your ANCs, talk at the council hearings, advocate for these organizations on the front line to get more resources. That's how we win. We're gonna win by individuals that think they don't have a voice going and testifying because every voice matters and we have these individuals on the front lines, testifying and letting these council members know that not enough has been done, and our safety is at a higher risk. Then we can put the pressure on these council members to follow what we put them in office to do, and that's to make sure that we live in a safe community where everyone is prospering in D. C.

Because that's the overall goal. We want everyone to feel like they're inclusive and able to prosper. But I got to take everyone. Even if you don't experience violence on a day to day basis or you're not in certain neighborhoods that's plagued with this violence, you're on the front line. You're on the front line by going and making sure your council members are held accountable. And that's what we want from each citizen. I want to help, and there's always different ways you

come down to the organization, find out which ways in which we can build the organization to be more sustainable, to understand that there's other moving parts in which we might be better suited to start looking at all, you know, obviously donations and and just things to help.

You know, everyone got their own way to help, but you just have to figure that out and we can help you. You know, everyone got the road to play so we can help any individual that wants to get involved and want to see what more they can do. We can help you figure that out and and wish your best role for you because we can't do it alone and we know that we can do it alone it's gonna take everybody if we wanna bring folks together and understand that love, the love more movement and one and one of our program managers for the violence interrupting peace for cure the streets. That's his movement. He wants people to love more. If we love more, we hate less. So how can we love more? And I think that's what we gotta start knowing in these communities. I wish that, um when you know, when speaking about violence and speaking about the work we do that more people would just ask how to get involved in and do, and I want them to get involved or what they can do. And what role can they play in this whole transformation and then just understanding that the love gotta come from everybody. If we really want to get to a safer community, safer DC. We have to have more love from each individual in this city, and we are going to do that.

But together we're strongly separate, they can keep implementing things that don't add up for the whole city and and just target a certain population. But together they have to listen and they have to do what we say as the community, we can be the a model. Let's create our own model in D. C. that becomes the model for the rest of the nation. That's what I want to emphasize that DC is gonna have its own model. And we're gonna be the village. We're gonna be the village, and we're going to create it and everybody else gonna have to get with our program, because it's gonna be the best program.

**JJ**

Amen. Thank you. Thank you so much.

**Clayton Rosenberg**

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

**\*\*\*music plays\*\*\***

**JJ**

So oddly enough in today's "unbelievable, but" I've got to tell you about what happens when you alter a toy gun to shoot real bullets. Yes, that is a sentence I had to say. And apparently this isn't a super uncommon modification, which is horrifying. So in an online forum that one of you great listeners sent to me. Thanks for that. Members post how they've altered their toys to be lethal. For example, one man added a .22 barrel to his Nerf gun. It's a lot, guys.

Now, how this works is essentially users getting the toy gun, placing a real gun or its components inside and then using the toy gun almost like a second skin. And while this may seem like weird fun, there are documented instances in which police have arrested individuals

with toy guns modified to conceal real firearms. In May of 2012 Fresno police arrested a man on a number of charges, one of which was illegally possessing a firearm hidden inside of a super soaker.

So, like I said it once twice, say it again. Guns are not toys. Don't try to make them look like one, but still please keep these stories coming by sending them to meet our website [Bradyunited.org/podcast](http://Bradyunited.org/podcast). I've been loving it. I've been loving everything that you guys have sent to me.

**\*\*\*music plays\*\*\***

**JJ**

Now in news this week we've got a lot of ground to cover. So all eyes have been on Virginia these past couple weeks. I've talked about it on the podcast a bunch because the state has taken up multiple gun violence prevention bills. Unfortunately, on Monday, the same bill we were celebrating just last week was passed over in committee a vote on the bill to ban assault weapons and high capacity magazines was deferred until next year, 2021 which left a lot of advocates very upset, you know, but not not discouraged. They're already working to make sure the seven other gun violence prevention bills that we talked about in the last episode that those will get passed by the state Senate.

This, though, is all happening amid backlash were more than 100 municipalities in Virginia have declared themselves so called Second Amendment sanctuaries, which again we've talked about on the podcast. We call them giant temper tantrums, with some local officials vowing not to enforce certain gun laws.

Yet deaths from firearms continue to rise around the U.S. So in Baltimore, Khaled Heeba, a Syrian refugee who came to Baltimore three years ago, he was shot and killed while delivering pizzas. He leaves behind parents who relied on their son for help and an older brother in Germany who can't even come to the U. S. due to travel bans affecting Syrians. His coworker, commented quote, "this is the life we live in right now. This is a war zone here. Do you leave your country to come here and ours is a war zone. Everybody's killing someone around the corner that you know end quote.

Another murder that made headlines this past week was that of the rising rapper Pop Smoke, who was killed in a home invasion in Los Angeles, and he was killed Wednesday at a home in the Hollywood Hills. A 911 call reported armed intruders inside the home police said. Though no suspects have currently been publicly identified. Pop Smoke had been scheduled to start a U.S. tour in Washington on March 2nd.

Meanwhile, in Las Vegas, in a city that saw the worst mass shooting in modern United States history less than three years ago, there was a way, way too little discussion of America's gun violence epidemic during Wednesday's Democratic presidential debate. This despite the fact that recent polls show that improving gun laws remains a top priority for the majority of Americans you know, a very marked increase since 2017. Yet the issue barely got mentioned at all.

**\*\*\*music plays\*\*\***

**Kelly**

Thanks for listening. As always, Brady's life saving work in Congress, the courts and communities across the country is made possible thanks to you for more information on Brady or how to get involved in the fight against gun violence, please like and subscribe to the podcast. Come see us online at Bradyunited.org or follow us on Social @BradyBuzz, be brave and remember, take action, not sides.

**\*\*\*Brady musical outro\*\*\***

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