



Community Activation Network: CAN May 27, 2021 Meeting Notes

Members of the Community Activation Network (CAN) met via Zoom on May 27, 2021.

The agenda for the meeting was as follows:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Interview, Discussion, and Q&A with Congressman John Yarmuth and his District Director, Dana Mayton
- *CAN-DID* Breakout Discussions and Report Out
- Closing

Welcome

Ann Coffey, CNPE CEO and CAN host, opened the meeting – extending a welcome to new members of the group as well as previous participants. She then introduced CAN Co-host Anthony Smith.

The Federal Response to Public Safety

Anthony introduced, and facilitated a discussion and Q&A with, Rep. Yarmuth and Ms. Mayton. Anthony highlighted the urgency of public safety in our area, as the rate of violent deaths appear to be continuing unabated. As Rep. Yarmuth could only attend the first part of the meeting, initial questions were directed toward him.

(Please note: Questions and responses have been paraphrased and edited for clarity and conciseness.)

How do you define public safety? What is your public safety agenda and how has the last year (particularly the murder of Breonna Taylor and the subsequent protests here in Louisville) influenced that agenda?

Public safety is being able to go about your daily life without fear of injury or death. In recent years, it has become apparent to me that there is a significant psychological element to public safety that we are ignoring. The issue is compounded by an atmosphere of hostility and mistrust in our communities – which is exacerbated by the discourse in the political arena. There seems to be an attitude of “I don’t have to worry about the public safety of others, and I can violate the safety of others if I need to.”

We need a holistic approach. The George Floyd bill is evidence of a desire to help, but it is far from a solution. Health is part of the public safety equation as well, with significant resistance to vaccination evidence of disregard for others’ well-being. Louisville itself isn’t doing anything wrong, per se. Major municipalities are seeing 35% to 50% increase in violence. So we are facing a national issue, not just a local one.

What impact and influence do your position and networks in Washington (your committee work, your relationships inside and outside of Congress, etc.) have on public safety here in Louisville?

As head of the Budget Committee, I have some influence over how federal money gets allocated on a macro level. Appropriations handles more specific allocation. My roles on the Education and Labor Committees also provide some levers to improve both education and working conditions.

I am passionate about education – especially for those who have not made much progress. Education is a major factor in determining one’s lifestyle and happiness.

We need to refocus our efforts in education – particularly early childhood education. We need to provide free, mandatory early childhood education as most other countries do. We have had some success locally, but more needs to be done. We should emphasize “survival skills” in our K-12 education: internet literacy and safety, financial literacy, and civics, for example. Less so about the transfer of knowledge – which evolves so rapidly and can be obtained through so many other means today. The most important skill is adaptability to change. Those who cannot adapt get frustrated and end up hating the world – and become prone to violence.

How are you encouraging local leaders to take advantage of the American Rescue Plan funding?

I haven’t had to! Local leadership is aware of the funding and is laying out strategy for its use. The funding has few restrictions, so there is a lot that could go to groups involved with public safety.

What does Louisville need to be doing to reimagine public safety? What are we missing?

Public safety is not my area of expertise. You all are the experts; I rely on you. New LMPD Chief Ericka Shields is well positioned to help change happen. We need to screen recruits more carefully. We need to relieve police officers of roles and responsibilities that social service experts could do better. We need to address and eliminate LMPD’s internal defense mechanisms so that officers can more effectively hold each other accountable.

How have protests and demands for justice shifted your thinking?

I am encouraged. The protests have been broad-based and diverse, with a lot of white and first-time participants, beyond the usual suspects. Community concern appears to be more diffuse; it must be contagious.

What else should we know? What else can you tell us?

If given the choice to pay attention to either local politics or federal politics, pay attention to Metro Hall and Frankfort. What happens in these places will affect you much more than what happens in Washington. What is happening in Washington is frustrating right now. Too many are acting out of an electoral policy frame rather than what is best for the country. If we cannot get past this, I fear for our democracy.

At this point, Rep. Yarmuth thanked participants for the invitation to be with them and share his thoughts on public safety and other subjects and excused himself to attend another meeting. Anthony then invited Ms. Mayton to share her thoughts on these topics.

What is your take on public safety?

I am always looking for that sweet spot between policy and politics, finding a way to get good policy through the political system. The American Rescue Plan is an example of that.

Nonprofits are filling a gap: government cannot do it all, but it can provide resources. The pandemic and racial equity issues have been feeding on each other; the nonprofit community has been amazing in its ability to meet human needs.

In regard to public safety, it is not overly simplistic to say public safety is anyone and everyone being able to go about their daily lives without fear of injury or death.

I welcome invitations from the groups represented on this call to visit so that I can get to know you better. I encourage you to identify synergies between local nonprofits and federal agencies and programs. Contact my office and we will help make those connections.

Why did more white people come out to protest?

I was at the march that a lot of white people attended, which I found encouraging. The Breonna Taylor killing was personal to this community and a wake-up call. White people realized that we can't expect the people most affected by this violence to fix it alone. It is a community issue and the entire community must address it.

Is this momentum longstanding? Will we merely shift back to normal? Or are we at a tipping point and change is here?

I am a forever optimist and I hope it continues to grow.

Before introducing CAN Co-Host Ashley Parrott and the CAN-DID Breakout Discussion, Anthony noted that the American Rescue Plan funding is coming and that we need to advocate for it to go to the right places. President Biden has acknowledged that some money needs to go to violence intervention programs. We need to keep kids alive. The Office for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods is asking for \$4.5 million to do community programming, and Louisville Metro Council is always questioning why. We're asking for peanuts and getting shells. Call Council members to advocate for support.

CAN-DID Breakout Discussions and Report Out

CAN co-host Ashley Parrott echoed Anthony's advice to watch where new dollars go. Now is the time to advocate for program funding.

Ashley then quickly addressed a question from Mackenzie Longoria on police violence affecting aging adults who may have dementia, whatever their race. Ashley echoed Rep. Yarmuth's advice that these issues must be addressed holistically.

Ashley then introduced the CAN-DID breakout discussions, asking participants to consider what resonated from the previous discussion:

- What reflections do you have?
- What questions do you have? What more would you like to know?
- How can nonprofits engage with the federal government to increase public safety?

Ashley reminded the group that the CAN-DID breakouts have a dual purpose: (1) to intentionally make new connections and strengthen relationships and (2) to learn and generate ideas with a bias toward action.

Participants broke into small groups, shared what resonated, and reconvened in the large group to share their discussions. Ashley facilitated the report-out; comments and points of discussion included:

- Concerns about mental health issues within the community and the effects of long-term disinvestment in it.
- Young adults in the community are experiencing obvious mental health issues resulting from a lack of housing and security – which impacts the entire community. We know what needs to be done; we just need to get to work and get programs funded. Bring on mental health reform and investment.

- There needs to be attention paid to where the funding is going. Some agencies are experiencing cuts even with ARP funding coming. We need more transparency around who is actually getting the funding and more reporting on the impact the funding is having. There doesn't appear to be an overarching structure to do this. The onus falls on the nonprofit community. How can we come together to have impact on how the funding gets distributed?
- Messaging is important. Ask a question about Breonna Taylor's death and it is taken as a stance against the police. The call to "defund the police" gets people's attention, but its full meaning is often misunderstood. What message would allow the conversation to move forward?
- Does LMPD have funding to provide mental health assistance to those it encounters?
- Regarding the ARP funding, it is imperative to have the right goals, accountability for those goals, and consequences for those with accountability for unmet goals.
- How does bias toward action relate to this group and what we are addressing?
- Can activists also work in / lead nonprofits?
- This summer will be deadly and bloody because of what people didn't do and haven't done for years. We have to understand *why* people are acting violently instead of merely judging them. So much violence is a result of bad policing.
- CNPE used to convene an advocacy group whose activities included lobbying Metro Council and the state legislature. Is it possible to revitalize that group to help influence policy? We should bring activists and nonprofits together to advocate for the sector and policies that are important to the sector.
- CNPE is organizing a series of informational sessions on federal funding and the flow of those funds – to assist with the effort to have an impact on how those funds get allocated. CNPE will announce the session dates soon.
- Ms. Mayton mentioned the Grant Alert newsletter. You can get on the newsletter by emailing Ms. Mayton at dana.mayton@mail.house.gov. Rep. Yarmuth will write a letter of support if you apply for grants. Gad Niyiragira is also on Yarmuth's staff and assists with this. You can contact him at gad.niyiragira@mail.house.gov.

Closing

Host Ann Coffey thanked participants for their thoughtful and candid engagement and encouraged participants to invite others to be in this space.

She also reminded participants that CAN will next meet on June 24. The topic will be *How Youth Respond to Public Safety* and will feature discussion and Q&A with local youth involved in the effort to decrease violence.