

MATT WILTSHIRE



Policy Priorities: *Public Safety*



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- Partner with religious institutions, nonprofits, and the private sector to expand successful gun-buyback and gun-retrieval programs
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“With all of the excellent colleges training teachers and dedicated nonprofits here, Nashville should have the best public schools in the country. To reach that goal we’re going to need to bring together the public sector, the private sector and the nonprofit sector to align our goals and efforts.” – Matt Wiltshire



I. Introduction

For many Nashvillians, our city doesn’t feel as safe as it once did. Matt knows that protecting communities is local government’s most fundamental responsibility, and as Mayor, public safety will be one of his top priorities.

As Mayor, Matt will fully staff our police department and work to reduce violence and get guns off our streets. He will double down on programs that divert community members experiencing behavioral health crises from the criminal justice system. And he will focus on breaking down silos and implementing unique, high-impact solutions that harness the power of partnerships with the nonprofit community and the private sector.

“Everyone deserves to feel safe in their community, and increasingly Nashville feels less safe than it used to.”

WKRN, 05/09/23

II. Reducing Gun Violence

Nashville’s annual homicide rate, which [peaked](#) at 114 in 2020, remains over 100. Ten years ago, [it was](#) 40. Violent crime rates here [rose](#) nearly 5 percent last year.

In a city still mourning the tragic shooting at the Covenant School, Matt will use his power as Mayor to help ensure that people whom a court has ordered not to possess guns do not, in fact, possess them. In a state with some of the [laxest](#) gun safety laws in the nation, Matt will harness the power of local government to get firearms off our streets, and he will strongly encourage gun owners to store their firearms safely.



Enforce court orders to dispossess violent individuals of their guns

Tennessee has a system for dispossessing some potentially violent individuals of their guns, but it [isn't working](#) like it should.

Our state's current gun-dispossession [process](#) was put in place in 2009. It allows victims of domestic violence and stalking to tell a court if their abuser has a gun and ask the judge to decide whether the weapon must be surrendered. Following the tragedy at the Covenant School, Governor Lee [proposed](#) expanding this process and allowing the general public to seek these extreme risk protection orders (ERPOs) for people deemed potentially violent to themselves or others. The Tennessee General Assembly may consider the governor's proposal at a special session this August.

But there's [a problem](#): Tennessee's current protective-order process has a significant and potentially dangerous loophole, which kicks in once a court orders a domestic-violence abuser to give up his or her firearms. While other states require abusers to turn over their guns to law enforcement, Tennessee allows them to give their guns to a third party, like a friend or a relative. Significantly, our state is the only one in the country that does not require abusers to say which third party, or whether that person is legally allowed to possess a firearm.

What's worse is that our state has no mechanism to ensure that the abuser actually turned over his or her guns to anyone. In theory, he or she is supposed to fill out an affidavit confirming surrender of the weapons, but advocates for domestic violence victims in Nashville say that form rarely gets filed with the court. How significant is this problem? In 2023, advocates here counted **nearly 30 violent offenders each month** who failed to prove to the court that they had actually dispossessed themselves of their firearms.

Matt knows that if our state's current firearms dispossession system is not enforceable, expanding it will not do enough to make Nashvillians safer. As Mayor, he will advocate with the state for the sort of gun safety laws that Nashvillians want and deserve. Beyond that, he will ensure that Nashville's courts and law enforcement officers have every resource they need to enforce dispossession orders.

"When I was at MDHA we worked directly with Metro Police and entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that increased patrols and got officers out of their cars walking the beat. We saw tremendous results in reduction of crime at those sites." - Matt Wiltshire, Tennessean, 05/24/23

**DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE**



REDUCE GUN VIOLENCE

“Prioritizing investments into mental health resources and evidence-based violence interruption programs are going to be critical in order to address violent crime.”
WKRN, 05/09/23

Matt will ensure that **Nashville’s courts have the funding necessary** to ensure that domestic violence offenders – along with those deemed to be a threat to themselves or others, if the legislature adopts Governor Lee’s proposal this August – comply with dispossession orders. He will also ensure that **law enforcement officers have the resources they need** to follow up when someone has failed to dispossess.

Partner with religious institutions, nonprofits, and the private sector to expand successful gun-buyback and gun-retrieval programs

Nashville’s government has long partnered with a variety of organizations, from sports teams to religious institutions to businesses, to host gun-buyback events. Participants in these events turn in firearms to law enforcement officers in exchange for gift cards, tickets to a sporting event, or even gas money. Gun buybacks have [taken](#) hundreds of guns off the street in recent years. The MNPD has also [partnered](#) with churches on gun-retrieval programs that offer Nashvillians a safe and trusted place to surrender firearms safely, with no questions asked.

As Mayor, Matt will **expand community partnerships to help more Nashvillians access gun-buyback and gun-retrieval programs**. While these initiatives on their own will not do enough to curb gun violence, Matt knows that anything we can do to get guns off our streets is a good thing, especially if these efforts are part of a broader effort to make our community safer.

Expand programs to make free gun locks available to any Nashvillian who wants one

Stolen guns [are](#) routinely used in criminal activities, and more than 70% of all guns stolen in Nashville are taken from vehicles. Gun owners are significantly [less likely](#) to have a gun stolen if they store all of their guns locked and unloaded, but more than half of gun owners do not. As Mayor, Matt will expand on the Metro Health Department’s gun lock-by-mail [program](#), as part of which free gun locks are available by mail to anyone who orders one, by working with the MNPD to **equip their patrol officers with free locks** to distribute as part of their work in the community.

III. Addressing Mental Health Issues

Our whole community benefits when Nashvillians experiencing behavioral health crises are connected to mental-health services and diverted out of the criminal justice system. Not only do these individuals receive the appropriate care they deserve, law enforcement resources are preserved for situations that actually require them.

Good Health
↓
Good Life





A number of successful pilot programs are aimed at helping our city meet these goals. [Partners in Care](#) has been a big success so far. It [pairs](#) mental health professionals from Nashville's Mental Health Cooperative with specially trained police officers, who together respond to 911 calls and other emergencies that may involve a mental health crisis. Once on the scene, MNPD officers [stabilize](#) the situation so clinicians can assess the individuals and connect them to the behavioral healthcare they need.

Last year, this growing program [responded](#) to more than 3,000 calls for service and diverted the vast majority of individuals – about 96% – out of the criminal justice system. Even with that level of service, this program has [not yet reached](#) every police precinct in Nashville. As Mayor, Matt will **make its expansion a priority**.

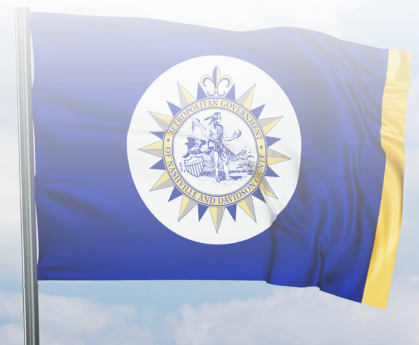
Today city ambulances sent by Fire Department dispatchers [take](#) more than 120 people experiencing behavioral health crises to the emergency room every week. Nashville's new [REACH](#) pilot program aims to reduce these numbers and free up valuable ambulance space.

REACH pairs a paramedic from the Nashville Fire Department with a master's-level clinician from the Mental Health Cooperative. Together, they arrive in an SUV and help the person in crisis get where they need to go – whether that's the Mental Health Cooperative, Centerstone, or even their own home – without an unnecessary ambulance transport.

This promising program is still in its pilot phase. The Metro Health Department is analyzing data to measure REACH's effectiveness. As Mayor, Matt will follow its progress, and if the data shows that the program works, he will **ensure that it has the resources it needs to expand**.

IV. Growing, Diversifying, and Efficiently Deploying Our Police Force

Across the country, police forces are struggling to recruit and retain police officers, and the Nashville MNPD is no exception. It has [grappled](#) with this challenge for years, particularly with respect to recruiting and retaining women and people of color.



Matt knows that Nashville's police officers and firefighters put their lives on the line every day for the safety of our city. As Mayor, he will support them by doing what he can to help fully staff and diversify their departments. He will also work to free up the officers we have by partnering with the MNPD to explore the idea of sending [civilian first responders](#) to calls that don't require a law enforcement response.

When it comes to training future generations of law enforcement officers, Nashville's HBCUs are a valuable - but underutilized - resource. [TSU's](#) criminal justice education program, for example, is one of the largest in the nation. Across [the country](#), and even here in [Tennessee](#), cities are facilitating partnerships between police departments and universities, including HBCUs. These efforts strengthen the college-to-police pipeline by allowing potential recruits to get hands-on experience, and potentially class or Police Academy credit, before they graduate. As Mayor, Matt will work with the **MNPD**, **HBCUs**, and programs like the city's **POWER Youth Summer Employment Initiative** and the MNPD's **Police Explorers program** to pursue and expand innovative opportunities like these.

Only 12 percent of Nashville's police officers are women, a rate that falls [below](#) the national average. And yet, we [know](#) that women officers generate fewer complaints from the public, fewer use-of-force incidents, and fewer lawsuits. The MNPD has [pledged](#) to ensure that women make up 30 percent of our police force by 2030. As Mayor, Matt will help reduce barriers to women entering - and staying in - law enforcement by partnering with the MNPD to expand family-friendly [policies and resources](#), e.g., childcare access and job-sharing arrangements, that **support women (and men) in balancing the demands of the job and the needs of their families.**



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