**Oakland Attempts to Revive the Ceasefire program**

In a city that has had years of violence and armed violence, Oakland is planning to resuscitate its Operation Ceasefire which was initiated in 2012. During its first phase which lasted for 5 years (2012-2017) approximately 140 were saved. But when the pandemic surfaced, attention was focused on dealing with the virus, and Operation Ceasefire was put on a backburner, but homicides slowly crept back as a homicides rose from 68 in 2018 to 124 in 2023.

Mayor Sheng Tao enthusiastically supported the resurrecting of Operation Ceasefire, and supported increasing the Ceasefire staff, improve data sharing between Oakland PD and the Department of Violence Prevention. Experts on gang violence were added and violence reduction plans are coordinated between the police department and city hall.

Many people are focusing attention on the progress of Operation Ceasefire and we are all hoping that it will be successful.

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**Oakland mayor set to revive praised Operation Ceasefire anti-violence program**

**By**[**Sarah Ravani**](https://www.sfchronicle.com/author/sarah-ravani/)**, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan 12, 2024**

Amid a troublesome spike in violent crime, Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao plans to reinvigorate a successful and widely praised anti-violence program known as Operation Ceasefire that helped reduce crime rates in the city for a half decade before fading out during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Tuesday, the Oakland City Council will review an [audit of the program](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/24359296-final-cf-report-oakland-0124) that was ordered by Thao when she took office last year. The mayor said she plans to follow the audit’s advice, which would have the Oakland Police Department and the Department of Violence Prevention switch their focus back to the community-based interdiction model pioneered by Operation Ceasefire.

Oakland’s Ceasefire program functioned by using data to identify a group of individuals most likely to commit or be victims of crime, and provide them with mentoring, life coaching and job resources. The idea is by focusing on people who engage in certain crimes, the program will be able to deter future violence.

[Launched in 2012](https://www.sfchronicle.com/eastbay/article/Oakland-hit-a-similar-homicide-inflection-point-a-16911624.php), the program was credited with reducing gun violence in the city. But after the pandemic forced its staff to work remotely, Operation Ceasefire gradually went dormant. Former Oakland police Chief LeRonne Armstrong instead created a centralized service called the [Violent Crime Operations Center](https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Oakland-police-chief-has-been-on-the-job-for-six-16402242.php) that the audit determined had been ineffective in tackling crime.

Thao said in a statement that under Operation Ceasefire, [Oakland became a national model for reducing gun violence](https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/oakland-bay-area-rates-18259788.php) and that she was proud to resurrect the program.

“Operation Ceasefire is a critical component of my comprehensive community safety strategy,” Thao said. “Ceasefire is an evidence-based strategy that started in Oakland and achieved success in reducing shootings, homicides, recidivism and victimization for those at highest risk.”

The audit, conducted by California Partnership for Safe Communities, an Oakland-based organization that includes two former Ceasefire directors, recommended that the city revive the program.

That will mean returning to a strategy that tries to help high-risk individuals before crimes happen, rather than working mostly with the victims of  crimes after the fact to prevent retaliation.

Oakland is struggling to get a handle on rising violence — last year, violent crime climbed by 21% and the city recorded 120 homicides for the second year in a row. In the first week of 2024, another four people died in homicides. Thao has said she is focused on building a robust Police Department and investing in violence prevention models.

The city is also in the midst of a protracted process to hire a new police chief. Thao [fired Armstrong](https://www.sfchronicle.com/eastbay/article/oakland-mayor-thao-fires-police-chief-armstrong-17780304.php) soon after taking office following an investigation that determined he mishandled two police misconduct cases. The police commission is currently putting together [a new shortlist of candidates](https://www.sfchronicle.com/eastbay/article/oakland-police-chief-18578155.php) for the job after Thao [rejected](https://www.sfchronicle.com/eastbay/article/oakland-mayor-rejects-police-chief-candidates-18576741.php) their original candidates, which included Armstrong.

Operation Ceasefire was designed to provide help and mentoring directly to individuals at high risk of becoming the victims or perpetrators of gun violence. In 2018, after the city recorded fewer homicides than it had in nearly two decades, [Oakland officials credited the work of Ceasefire](https://www.sfchronicle.com/crime/article/Oakland-homicides-other-crimes-dip-to-13506977.php).

“When the prescription is followed and implemented correctly, we’ve seen enormous reductions,” said Ersie Joyner III, a retired Oakland police captain and former director of Ceasefire. Joyner was part of the team that audited the program at Thao’s behest.

Yet even before COVID, the audit found, Oakland’s leaders had begun pulling back on Ceasefire, watering down its strategy and stripping away resources. The dismantling was hastened by California’s shelter-in-place order in 2020, which prevented case workers from going into communities affected by violence.

At the same time, Armstrong’s Violent Crime Operations Center did away with police units that had been set up around the city and consolidated them into a central command that responded to shootings and homicides throughout Oakland and made arrests. The strategy prioritized solving past crimes and failed to cut violence, according to the audit.

“The city basically walked away from the Ceasefire strategy,” said Reygan Cunningham, the co-director of the California Partnership for Safe Communities, who worked as the director of Ceasefire from 2012 to 2018. “It was a clear shift. That is one of the reasons that we believe we haven’t seen the same type of reductions … that we’d seen in the prior period because the city wasn’t actually implementing the strategy.”

In recommending that the Police Department disband its Violent Crime Operations Center, the audit also noted that the number of homicides it solved fell from 50% in 2020 to 35% in 2022.

Oakland said it aims to implement all of the audit’s recommendations — some of which can happen immediately. Others, including staffing up the program, will take time and money. The city did not provide figures on how much full implementation would cost.

Tony Jones, the assistant chief of the Oakland Police Department, said the department is already in the process of shifting personnel to restaff the Ceasefire unit and expects to be done by Jan. 20. He said Ceasefire will be fully staffed with four teams and 32 officers, four supervisors and two lieutenants. In addition, the department will reestablish crime-reduction teams with captains and a team of dedicated officers in six geographic areas of the city.

“We don’t dispute any of these findings,” Jones said. “We find all of them pretty accurate, and we are committed to implementing all of them.”

The audit also determined that the city’s Department of Violence Prevention lacked a “cohesive structure” to meet the needs of high-risk people and recommended that it work more closely with Ceasefire.

Holly Joshi, the [newly appointed chief](https://www.sfchronicle.com/eastbay/article/oakland-names-holly-joshi-chief-violence-18504645.php) of the Department of Violence Prevention, said that by mid-February its life coaches and violence interrupters will mostly focus on Ceasefire clients.

The department aims to combine its violence interrupters and outreach workers to focus on finding and working with high-risk individuals, and will ensure that the department’s life coaches spend 70% of their caseload on Ceasefire referrals. Currently, outreach workers and violence interrupters go into the community after a crime occurs to work with victims and try to prevent retaliation.

Joshi said the department will implement an intensive life coaching program and will move all direct service staff under one deputy chief. Currently, the department has life coaches and violence interrupters report to two deputy chiefs, and there are no formalized information sharing processes in place.

“This is a pivot from a reactive model that is putting our (violence interrupters) in the community after things have happened,” Joshi said.

Now, the department will focus on proactively engaging with people in need of support before a crime occurs. The audit estimated that with the current volume of shootings in Oakland, there are about 350 people who are considered very high risk of being involved in gun violence over the course of a year. That reorganization is expected to be completed by mid-February.

In addition to restructuring in the city’s police and violence departments, the audit recommended that the mayor’s office designate a senior staffer to hold coordination meetings with all the involved departments and conduct quarterly performance reviews. It also called on the Police Department to hold weekly shooting review meetings.

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OAKLAND SEEKS TO RESURRECT OPERATION CEASEFIRE AFTER NEW AUDIT LINKS ITS END TO RISING CRIME

*By [Anser Hassan](https://abc7news.com/about/newsteam/anser-hassan) and Tim Johns,* Tuesday, January 16, 2024



The city of Oakland is looking to resurrect its Operation Ceasefire program to combat violence.

OAKLAND, Calif. (KGO) -- Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao traveled to Washington D.C. on Tuesday to discuss gun violence prevention and securing federal resources to improve public safety in Oakland.

In a presentation to the Oakland city council Tuesday, the California Partnership for Safe Communities tied the ending of Operation Ceasefire with the current spike in crime in the city.

"It's focused on deterrence. So we are identifying and focusing on the less than 1% of community members who are at the center of violence and driving gun violence in this city," says Holly Joshi, who heads Oakland's Department of Violence Prevention.

Oakland's Operation Ceasefire became a national model for tackling gun violence when introduced 10 years ago. It focused attention on a small group of individuals and gangs. And also established programs like job training, counseling and social services.

New data suggests that the data-driven Operation Ceasefire worked. According to city of Oakland, there was a 42% drop in homicides from 2012 to 2017. Approximately 140 lives saved. But then came the pandemic and shift away from the ceasefire model.

**MORE:**[**Study credits ceasefire strategy for reducing gun violence in Oakland**](https://abc7news.com/ceasefire-strategy-opd-oakland-police-department/4033914/)