



Special Committee on Criminal Justice Reform
of the Council of the City of Philadelphia

Friday, April 15, 2016, Room 400, City Hall

**Written Testimony of Lieutenant William Eddis,
Commanding Officer, Police Athletic League of Philadelphia**

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify about the Police Athletic League of Philadelphia (PAL) and the role we play in ensuring Philadelphia's neighborhoods are safe for our young people.

The mission of the Police Athletic League of Philadelphia (PAL) is "Cops Helping Kids." We aspire to be the premier youth-serving organization in the city by reducing crime, promoting character development and improving educational outcomes.

We do this by having Philadelphia Police Officers, supported by a civilian staff, offering recreational, educational and cultural opportunities to our youth in 18 centers located throughout the city. The majority of our centers are located in the city's highest crime and lowest income neighborhoods.

PAL Centers are safe havens, offering a variety of programs and other events to attract, engage, and develop more than 18,000 of Philadelphia's youth between the ages of 6-18.

PAL is both a unit of the Philadelphia Police Department and a 501C3 non-profit organization. I will testify on the police side of the organization and Ted Qualli, PAL's Executive Director, will testify on the non-profit side.

The current complement of the PAL Unit includes 27 police officers, two Sergeants and one Lieutenant. Many of the officers in this unit share a similar background to me. Growing up, I was a PAL kid. I spent time playing at Gibbons PAL Center and always saw it as a safe place to have fun with my friends.

What kept me coming back to my PAL Center as a kid, above and beyond sports, was my PAL Officer. I knew he cared about me and my friends and could trust the man-to-man advice he gave to us when we needed it. That happened pretty often, to be honest. I valued that mentoring relationship and think that is THE piece that distinguishes PAL.

As a member of the Philadelphia Police Department, I have been assigned as an officer and a supervisor to numerous police districts and the Narcotics Unit. During my twenty-year career in law enforcement I have worked in some of our city's toughest neighborhoods,



encountering the issues we are here to talk about today. Unfortunately, in these areas, violence and drugs were, and are, commonplace.

This in part is what led me to PAL. Like many officers, I grew tired of showing up after the crime had occurred. At that point, it was most often too late to try and direct someone to resources outside the criminal justice system. In many cases, poor decisions, addiction, and lack of resources created a negative impact on many lives.

PAL is an alternative. It is proactive, community policing at its best.

By design, we seek to operate centers in the City's highest crime and lowest income neighborhoods. We currently operate 18 PAL Centers in 11 different Police Districts located throughout the City of Philadelphia, with multiple Centers in the 2nd, 15th, 19th, 22nd, and 24th Districts.

We are currently in the process of opening two new Centers:

- **Grays Ferry PAL** in the 17th Police District at 32nd and Reed at the Salvation Army
- **The new Tucker PAL** in the 18th Police District at 4040 Ludlow in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania's Division of Public Safety. This will replace a center located at 46th and Woodland inside the Wilson School which was closed and subsequently sold by the School District of Philadelphia.

Consider what has transpired in two Philadelphia neighborhoods in recent years: After PAL opened centers at Harrowgate (851 E. Tioga St.) and Oxford Circle (1267 E. Cheltenham Ave.), juvenile arrests within 6-8 blocks of the centers dropped the following year, beyond citywide trends (39% decline in juvenile arrests around Harrowgate versus 6% citywide for the period of May 2010-June 2011; 16% decline around Oxford Circle versus 10% citywide for the period of August 2010-September 2012).

Most youth are drawn to PAL because of our sports programs, with basketball being the most popular choice, followed by flag football. To promote youth engagement and healthy competition, we hold citywide tournaments at the end of sport seasons.

With that said, PAL is more than simply a place to participate in sports.

PAL also provides youth with academic support and character-building programs. All of PAL's centers provide daily homework help, and nearly all centers offer computer labs and computer education clubs. We take kids outside their neighborhoods for special events and outings, including to college campuses for tours as well as to watch the home team.



During the school year, PAL operates from 1:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. This is to counter the peak in juvenile violence that occurs in the afterschool hours on school days.

As City of Philadelphia Public Schools conclude instruction for the year, officers assigned to PAL centers transition from working a 1p x 9p tour of duty to a 9am x 5pm tour. The shift in operational hours is done so that we can continue to provide services to PAL youth throughout the day and deliver interesting, engaging, and structured programming during summer recess.

Our Police and Civilian staff is working to enhance and expand opportunities through additional sports clinics and leagues, education and cultural programming, as well as new and expanded external partnerships.

Some of our recurrent summer programing includes:

Monday after school lets out, PAL will kick off the summer with PECO Day at the Zoo for 200 children. The next day, our citywide sports programs begin.

- Partnering with Legacy Youth Tennis and Education and providing three hours of tennis instruction daily for more than 400 kids. This program operates for eight weeks and is held at various tennis sites throughout the city.
- Partnering with the Kids on the Hill Golf and First Tee, PAL provides an eight-week golf program 3 days a week for approximately 200 kids at a variety of golf locations in the Philadelphia region.
- Baseball will take place in the afternoons on Monday through Thursday for a 6-week period and will involve more than 250 boys and girls. A unique part of our baseball program is the kickoff, which involves kids from every PAL Center in a homerun derby with the Phillies.

One special highlight of the summer is when hundreds of PAL children and volunteers participate in the City's annual Wawa Welcome America Go Fourth and Learn celebration.

August is "camp month." We run two separate week-long education camps – one of which is focused on STEM. We also run boys' and girls' basketball camps and numerous field trips to museums and amusement parks.

Again, each of these activities is overseen by caring, committed PAL officers.



We have and will continue to provide fun, safe, and free opportunities for the children of Philadelphia. This will keep our young people active, involved, and most importantly out of trouble. We have done this for close to 70 years in this great city and will always strive to be the best youth programming organization.

Last year, for the first time, the Police Department authorized overtime for the officers allowing PAL to extend our summer hours, offering Friday evening hours from 5-9 pm and Saturday hours from 1-9 pm. In the 15 centers where we offered these hours, we had 6,000 visits from kids during the nine-week program. The overtime cost to the city was just shy of \$100,000. The non-profit side of PAL covered the non-police related costs associated with these increased operations.

This partnership between the City, the PAL Board and the non-profit makes efforts like this possible, and frankly the envy of PAL organizations across the country.

As we work on plans for this summer, I have briefed the Police Department's new leadership team on last year's success and the attendance patterns we saw. Following their review, preliminary approval has been granted for PAL to implement a similar extended hours plan this summer.

Additionally, both the civilian and police staff at PAL is working to enhance summer programming this year as part of the implementation of our new five-year strategic plan.

On that note, let me introduce you to Ted Qualli, the Executive Director of the non-profit side of PAL.