

COMMUNITY DEBRIEF: MASS CASUALTY INCIDENT

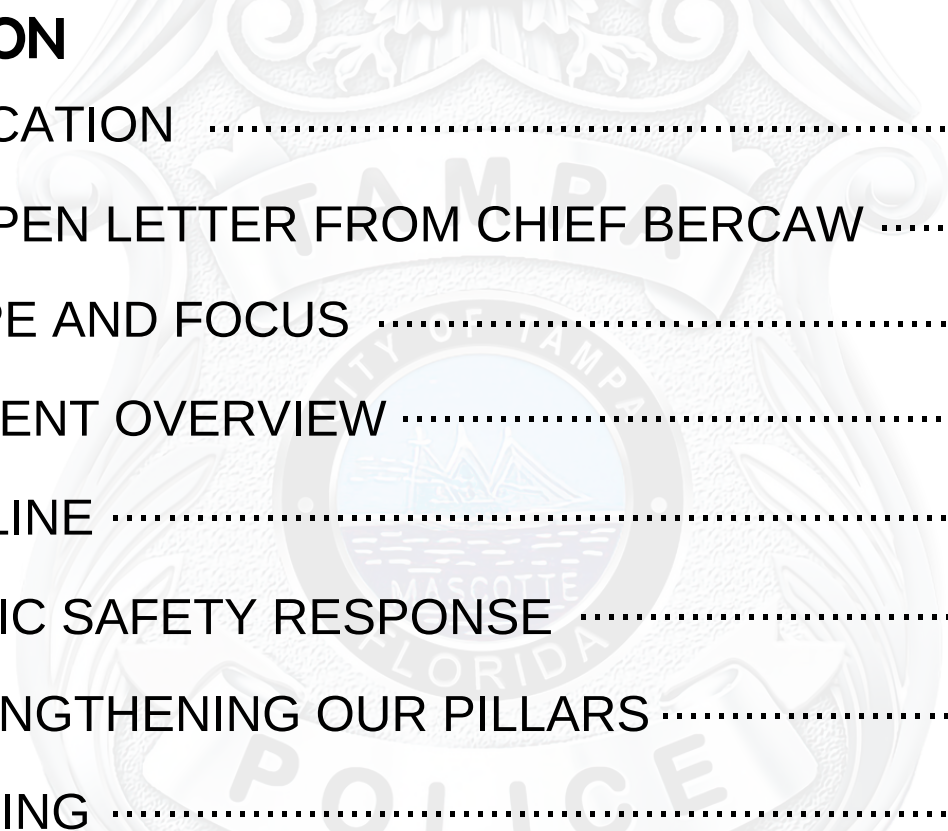
October 29, 2023

Tampa, Florida



LEE BERCAW, CHIEF OF POLICE

TABLE OF CONTENTS



SECTION	Page
DEDICATION	2
AN OPEN LETTER FROM CHIEF BERCAW	3
SCOPE AND FOCUS	4
INCIDENT OVERVIEW	5
TIMELINE	6
PUBLIC SAFETY RESPONSE	11
STRENGTHENING OUR PILLARS	12
CLOSING	20

COMMUNITY DEBRIEF: MASS CASUALTY INCIDENT

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DEDICATION

This mass casualty community debriefing of the events that occurred on October 29, 2023, in Tampa, Florida is dedicated to those who were lost on that tragic night:

***Harrison Boonstoppel
Elijah Wilson***

Our deepest sympathies extend to their families, friends, and loved ones.

We also acknowledge the profound impact this event has had on the sixteen individuals injured by gunfire in this senseless act of violence and the countless Tampa community members who witnessed it. We stand with you in unity and offer resources and support as you process and recover from this trauma.

Let this report serve as a step toward understanding the event, preventing future tragedies, and fostering the resilience of our community.

AN OPEN LETTER FROM CHIEF BERCAW



City of Tampa

Jane Castor, Mayor

**Tampa Police Department
Lee Bercaw, Chief of Police**

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To our Tampa community,

The Tampa Police Department is deeply concerned about gun violence, especially when young members of our community are involved. Although there was an overall decrease in juvenile-related gun crime between 2022 and 2023, those involved with guns are at a significantly higher risk of injury or death, both to themselves and others. These incidents not only endanger the lives of innocent people but also represent a troubling national trend that we are committed to addressing in our hometown. Juveniles are more likely to make impulsive decisions and lack the experience to handle firearms safely. Additionally, the presence of a gun in a volatile situation can quickly escalate to tragedy, as evident on the night of October 29, 2023 and again on April 9, 2024.

While the Tampa Police Department is dedicated to arresting those involved in gun crimes, preventing these incidents from happening in the first place should be a shared goal for every member of our community. Reducing access to guns from those who should not have them is a focus of our *PROJECT: Locked & Unloaded* program, which provides free gun locks to responsible gun owners. In 2023, Tampa Police recovered almost 2,000 guns from the street. In the same year, 79% of all auto burglaries were to vehicles that were left unlocked. From those unlocked vehicles, 197 guns were stolen.

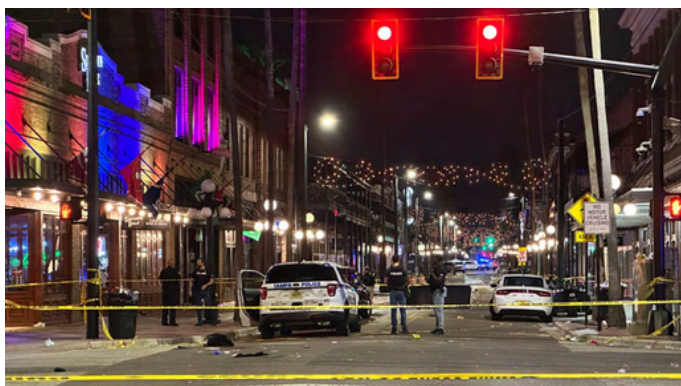
The Tampa Police Department focuses on reducing crime and building relationships with community members and is equally committed to building trust and positive relationships with young people through educational programs, mentorship initiatives, and community events. Access to youth-focused outlets and mentorship include our School Resource Officer program, Bigs in Blue, Police Athletic League (PAL), Resources in Community Hope (RICH) House program, the TPD Youth Academy, the TPD Police Explorer program, the Chief's Youth Advisory Council, and "Stay & Play", our partnership program with the City of Tampa Parks & Recreation Department.

We need the help of our community to further reduce, and ultimately prevent, gun crimes from occurring. We urge parents, guardians, role models, and mentors to secure firearms safely and keep them out of the reach of minors. Talk openly with your children about the dangers of guns and be aware of your child's activities and social circles. Report any suspicious activity to the police before there is a chance for violence to escalate.

The safety of our community is our top priority. Law enforcement, parents, educators, social service providers, and all members of the community can create a safer environment for our youth, and, in the end, we will make Tampa safer, together.

Lee Bercaw
Chief of Police

SCOPE AND FOCUS

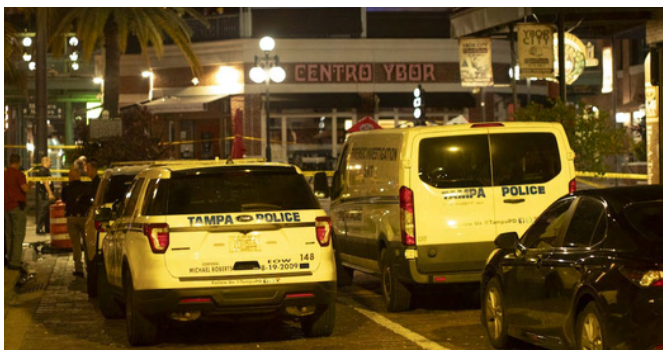


On October 29, 2023, the Tampa Police Department (TPD) responded to a critical incident with mass casualties. It was quickly determined that this was not a targeted attack, a terrorist attack, nor an active shooter situation; but rather a feud among two groups of individuals involved in an argument that quickly erupted into gunfire. The chaotic nature of the incident was amplified for first

responders as many in attendance were wearing costumes for the holiday weekend, many with replica firearms. As thousands began running from the sounds of gunfire, officers were forced to quickly ascertain if anyone in costume was an active threat or suspected shooter, while also identifying and triaging victims, and ensuring their safety in response to the situation.

The gunfire resulted in the death of two young members of our community and critical injuries being sustained by 16 others. This mass casualty incident, the largest single, critical incident Tampa has seen in decades, was the tragic outcome of individuals choosing gunfire to address disputes, resulting in death and injury to innocent bystanders in the process. TPD responded urgently to the incident and worked with our community in the days and months following to arrest those involved, address ongoing concerns, and restore a sense of safety in Ybor.

Two lives were lost, and many others were forever altered on Halloween weekend in 2023. We all must work together, diligently, to ensure those victims and their families are supported and our community feels safe. We hope this Community Debrief will provide insight into the response as well as outline collaborative efforts that law enforcement, property owners, business operators, workers, residents, and city leaders can take toward developing long-term solutions that address continued crime reduction and proactive approaches to secure a feeling of safety for all those who work, live, and visit the City of Tampa. The goal of this report is to provide transparency and engage our community in developing partnered solutions that will help us all make Tampa safer, together.



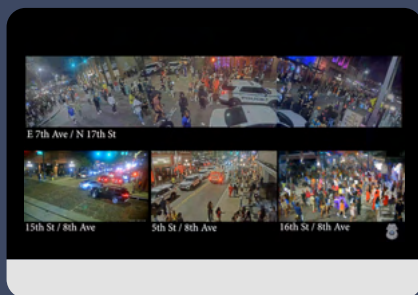
INCIDENT OVERVIEW

On October 29th, 2023, TPD Officers responded to the 1600 block of E. 7th Ave. for the report of a shooting. This shooting escalated from a feud between two groups who knew each other that erupted into gunfire within seconds. 14-year-old Elijah Wilson and 20-year-old Harrison Boonstoppel died from the injuries they suffered as a result of the shooting; 16 others were injured by the gunfire.

The investigation revealed this shooting was not the result of a terrorist act. The shooting occurred during Halloween weekend with larger than normal crowds with many wearing costumes, some with replica weapons. Within hours of the shooting, TPD detectives arrested 22-year-old Tyrell Stephen Phillips and charged him with Second Degree Murder in the death of Elijah Wilson.

In December 2023, TPD detectives charged 14-year-old Kadyn Abney with Second Degree Murder With A Firearm, Attempted Aggravated Battery, and Attempted Murder for his role in the death of Harrison Boonstoppel. 21-year-old Dwayne Tillman, Jr., was arrested and also charged for his role in the shooting.

CCTV CAMERA



[CLICK HERE](#)

INCIDENT RECAP



[CLICK HERE](#)

TIMELINE

Saturday,
October 28,
2023
10:00 p.m.

Enhanced Ybor deployment commences. There are more than 50 officers included in the Operations Plan to include Patrol, Mounted, and Extra Duty and Overtime Officers.

10:00 p.m.
10:30 p.m.

Officers are deployed at various locations along 7th Ave. and in the immediate vicinity for overt presence.

Sunday,
October 29,
2023
2:44 a.m.

In their secondary assignment roles, officers respond to 7th Ave. and 17th St. to prepare for nightclub closures and mass exodus to the street. This response requires numerous officers on foot, in vehicles, and on horseback. This is done to create a safe egress for people to get back to their cars, rideshare, etc.

2:44 a.m.

Officers begin to assemble around the two police cars that were now parked at the intersection of 7th Ave. and 17th St. in preparation for crowd dispersal and egress.

TIMELINE

2:46 a.m.

Three gunshots ring out in the direction of 7th Ave. and 16th St., causing the crowd to frantically disperse. Several officers form a line and begin heading toward the sound of the shots.

2:47 a.m.

Within seconds of the first round of gunfire, additional shots ring out. Numerous officers seek cover while attempting to identify the source of the shots. Seconds later, the officers continue forward to search for the shooter(s) and render aid to the victims injured in the shooting.

14-year-old Elijah Wilson was shot by Tyrell Phillips near the intersection of 7th Ave. and 16th St., where he died as a result of his injuries.

20-year-old Harrison Boonstoppel was shot by Kadyn Abney near 1611 E. 7th Ave. Officers begin to render emergency first aid.

Officers observe the shooting from their position at 7th Ave. and 16th St. near a 7-Eleven convenience store. They actively pursue the suspects but are not able to apprehend them.

Officers responding on foot and by vehicle begin aid to multiple victims, injured by gunfire or other forms of trauma.

2:50 a.m.

Tampa Fire Rescue takes over providing first aid for Harrison Boonstoppel, transporting him to a nearby hospital. He was later pronounced deceased.

TIMELINE

2:55 a.m.

The TPD Real Time Crime Center review video captured on Ybor cameras and put out a description of several shooters.

3:12 a.m.

Phillips approaches an officer at the scene and turns himself in for shooting Elijah Wilson. Phillips also surrenders the gun he used.

Although Phillips initially alleged the shooting was in self-defense, video provided by the community and via surveillance cameras proved otherwise.

4:00 a.m.

The FBI, and ATF are informed of the event and representatives from both agencies respond to the scene to assist with the investigation. State Attorney Lopez arrived on scene. The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) Forensics Unit also responds to provide supplemental aid.

Monday
October 30,
2023

TPD Detectives continue to follow up on active leads to include reviewing video from City of Tampa (COT) cameras located throughout the Ybor District, body worn camera video, surveillance video supplied by local businesses, and numerous videos submitted from witnesses present during the night of the shooting.

TIMELINE

**Tuesday
October 31,
2023**

TPD increase overt presence in neighborhoods throughout the city for Halloween. Along with being in patrol cars, TPD officers patrol on foot, bike, and horseback to ensure an increased sense of safety for the community.

**Wednesday
November 1,
2023**

A person of interest is identified and a bulletin is disseminated to regional law enforcement agencies.

**Friday
November 3,
2023**

After consultation with the State Attorney's Office (SAO), a Juvenile Pickup Order is issued for Abney on the charges of Carrying a Concealed Firearm and Minor in Possession of a Firearm.

**Monday
November 6,
2023**

Video is provided to the TPD Public Information Office (PIO) for public release, bodycam of suspect in blue hoodie and knit cap with black shirt and video of male in yellow hoodie.

TIMELINE

Thursday
November 16,
2023

Abney is arrested in West Palm Beach, FL. TPD Detectives drive to Palm Beach County to conduct an interview with Abney.

Wednesday
December 6,
2023

During the case review with SAO, the decision is made to charge as follows:

- Kadyn Abney - Second Degree Murder with a Firearm, Attempted Aggravated Battery, and Attempted Second Degree Murder.
- Dwyane Tillman – Attempted Second Degree Murder and Attempted Aggravated Battery

Abney was arrested and charged in the death of Harrison Boonstoppel.

Thursday
December 7,
2023

Tampa Police detectives locate and arrest 21-year-old Dwayne Tillman, Jr., for his role in connection with the October 29 shooting.

Wednesday
February 7,
2024

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) determine that the projectile recovered from another gunshot victim matched the projectile recovered from Harrison Boonstoppel, confirming Abney also shot another victim.

PUBLIC SAFETY RESPONSE

The initial information about the shooting was communicated to the public and media via a Media Alert, news briefings, and social media posts on official TPD accounts (*/@TampaPD*). News conferences were coordinated by the TPD PIO. COT Mayor Jane Castor, COT Chief of Staff John Bennett, Chief of Police Lee Bercau, and State Attorney Suzy Lopez participated in the initial news briefings. The news conference announcing the arrest of the first suspect was approximately twelve hours after the shooting.

In the days following the shooting, the TPD released images and video from the morning of the shooting soliciting community assistance in identifying additional persons of interest in the case. The PIO also worked with the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) to create a website for community members and witnesses to submit videos and photos online to streamline the numerous tips being submitted.



On October 31, 2023, local media outlets shadowed officers as they conducted foot patrols in Ybor City – day and night – to highlight the increased public safety visibility. In addition to utilizing the media, social media and online platforms, the PIO focused efforts on community engagement to foster discussion among community and business leaders. The TPD hosted a Town Hall specifically related to the Mass Casualty Incident, two weeks after the shooting, to engage the community directly, answer questions, and address concerns about public safety. Approximately 150 community members provided feedback.



STRENGTHENING OUR PILLARS

The following section will outline observations, findings, and recommendations for improvement in the overall public safety response to the Mass Casualty Incident that occurred on October 29, 2023. These will be categorized into the four key public safety focus areas that serve as the foundational pillars of the Tampa Police Department:



COMMUNITY ORIENTATED
POLICING



QUALITY ASSURANCE



CRIME REDUCTION



WELLNESS

Public safety is strongest when when a clearly defined and established foundation informs both the community and their public servants of what they can do and the role they can play in reducing crime and enhancing quality of life. Community-oriented policing builds trust and promotes collaboration between the community and the officers who protect and serve. This partnership allows for better identification of local crime concerns and empowers the community to be active participants in developing solutions. Crime reduction strategies are then developed and implemented to target these specific issues, reducing criminal activity and the fear of crime that may be associated with it. Maintaining a high-quality of service is crucial to success. Quality assurance measures ensure department personnel are well-trained and that procedures are understood and followed, which fosters trust and legitimacy for the community in their police department. Finally, officer and community wellness are paramount to a safe city. Public safety employees are less susceptible to burnout and are better equipped to build positive relationships when physical and mental health concerns are addressed. In turn, a healthy community is more likely to take an active role in cooperative partnerships with law enforcement, creating a positive cycle that ultimately enhances the goal of making Tampa safer, together.

The intent of analyzing the incident through the lens of the four established agency pillars is to provide transparency into the valuable insight gained regarding the Tampa Police Department's readiness and response to a mass casualty event, outline key recommendations and considerations for review, define actions that the community can take to ensure a safer Tampa, while strengthening the foundational pillars of the Tampa Police Department.

STRENGTHENING OUR PILLARS

COMMUNITY-ORIENTED POLICING

The TPD has a strong working relationship with the Ybor residential and business communities hosting Town Halls and Front Porch Roll Calls. The TPD has two officers assigned as Ybor City Liaisons as well as an officer assigned as a Business Affairs Liaison, collaborating with business owners to be part of a networking alliance that works directly with law enforcement to create a safe, family-friendly atmosphere for visitors. Relationships that were developed because of existing Community-Oriented Policing efforts contributed to an effective response, notably business owners quickly reviewing and providing video evidence that aided the investigation.

To improve public safety in years past, the TPD and the Ybor City community worked with the Responsible Hospitality Institute (RHI), a private non-profit agency that provides technical assistance that builds local capacity, incubates and shares cutting-edge information and proven strategies, and links a broad-based network of professionals who plan, manage and police nightlife districts.

The TPD will continue to hold Town Halls and Front Porch Roll Calls on a routine basis with residents and businesses to maintain an open dialogue for shared problem-solving approaches to local concerns.

The TPD would encourage Ybor City stakeholders to consider refresher training and engagement with RHI. Community leaders and residents are also encouraged to participate in tabletop exercises with first responders that can simulate a mass casualty incident to build trust and foster a sense of shared responsibility. The TPD Business Affairs Liaison can assist business partners and community partners to join in these efforts.

STRENGTHENING OUR PILLARS

CRIME REDUCTION

The TPD adjusts staffing in Ybor by increasing the number and visible presence of officers as the volume of guests begins to increase during the nightlife entertainment surge. This includes a special police Ybor operational plan with primary and secondary assignments. With weekend attendance in Ybor City, the TPD evaluates both the closing of 7th Ave. in congested areas and leaving the road open as late as possible before the bars and nightclubs close to enhance safety for those leaving at the end of the night. As it was Halloween weekend, there was a larger-than-average attendance in Ybor on the night of the shooting. TPD anticipated the expected increase in attendance and staffed additional on-duty personnel.

The TPD also has technological tools to enhance public safety in the Ybor City Historic District, including Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) and security cameras. However, many are behind in the latest technological capabilities; moreover, there are gaps in camera coverage in key areas.

The TPD offers many youth-related programs to provide mentorship and safe alternatives to crime-related activity. From 2022 to 2023, the number of juveniles involved in gun-related crimes decreased by 6.5% in Tampa. While TPD will continue working closely with the SAO in the prosecution of violent offenders and those involved in gun-related crimes, the goal of preventing these crimes will rely on community and business partnerships for enhanced success.

STRENGTHENING OUR PILLARS

CRIME REDUCTION

The TPD will continue to collaborate with community organizations and mental health professionals to identify at-risk youth who may be more susceptible to gang involvement or violence and provide safer options and alternatives. While the TPD program PROJECT: LOCKED & UNLOADED provides free gun locks to improve overall safe gun storage, the TPD will also work in partnership with the SAO and Hillsborough County School District to develop interactive gun safety workshops to teach youth and their guardians about the dangers of firearms, safe storage practices, and the legal consequences of misuse. The TPD would encourage parents, guardians, and role models to have difficult discussions with juveniles about the dangers and consequences that can come as a result of using a gun.

As additional investment in cameras and license plate readers in Ybor is critical to assisting investigators in solving and preventing crime, the TPD is currently working to obtain funding from the State of Florida to upgrade/add cameras and ALPRs in the Ybor City Historic District. Local businesses are encouraged to review their own security systems to ensure they provide the level of performance and sense of safety expected. While many business partners were able to provide security video that aided in the investigation, others reported that their cameras were no longer in working order.

STRENGTHENING OUR PILLARS

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The TPD consistently reviews deployment and operational plans related to staffing, with a strong focus on areas with a cluster of nightlife entertainment venues, to proactively police these potential hotspots efficiently. The goal is to staff areas of the city that experience peak nightlife surges with adequate overtime so as not to rely on the reallocation of officers. More than 50 police officers were working on and near the 7th Ave corridor in Ybor when the incident occurred. The TPD assigns personnel to Ybor, with the majority being on-duty resources, requiring reallocation of personnel during peak operational periods. Additionally, the TPD Real Time Crime Center (RTCC) proactively monitors and assists officers working in Ybor City during peak nightlife hours.

The TPD officers and command staff visited the Orlando Police Department (OPD) in the wake of the incident to confer with their public safety counterparts and learn what police measures were used effectively, specifically in Orlando's entertainment district. TPD learned that most OPD officers work their operation on days off versus reallocating personnel from other areas of the city. Orlando has an established city ordinance that provides a funding source from nightclubs in their entertainment district to offset the cost of any incurred overtime. Orlando also adopted an ordinance engaging and holding the entertainment district venues accountable for public safety. While street closures in Ybor seemed counterproductive, in Orlando they appeared effective.

STRENGTHENING OUR PILLARS

QUALITY ASSURANCE

COT Ordinance 27-178(c) requires the presence of a parking lot attendant on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, between 10:00 p.m. and 4:00 a.m. A security guard would be much more beneficial. The TPD Legal Unit is reviewing the current COT ordinance to determine if any modifications can be made to improve public safety. Their findings, along with the findings on the Orlando city ordinance related to engaging and holding their entertainment district venues accountable for public safety will be provided to policymakers for review and consideration in the City of Tampa.

The TPD worked diligently to communicate efficiently and effectively with the public and the media following the incident. News conferences and updates were scheduled quickly, and information was shared with as broad an audience as possible. Additionally, a Town Hall was facilitated with the local community to address as many concerns as possible related to the event and have open dialogue on shared approaches to public safety.

Clear and consistent leadership was demonstrated throughout the response from all levels of the department, city, and assisting agencies. Policies and procedures were found to have been followed by all officers and professional staff personnel in response to this mass casualty event.

The TPD has and continues to work closely with the SAO in the prosecution of violent offenders, including holding violent youthful offenders accountable. In this case, three arrests were quickly made on a variety of related charges, up to and including murder.

STRENGTHENING OUR PILLARS

WELLNESS

Public safety professionals, unfortunately, must routinely bear witness to traumatic events and these re-occurring encounters create enormous stress on an individual who is already in a high-stress profession. On October 29, 2023, victims, family members, and witnesses were confronted with a life-altering event and the after-effects of the tragedy. The incident had a significant impact on the mental and physical well-being of officers and the community.

The TPD Victim's Advocate immediately began working with the victims and their families in the immediate aftermath of the shooting, connecting them to wellness resources and provided continued follow-up contact.

The TPD has an established internal wellness program that includes a critical incident stress management team and a peer support program. These teams were made immediately available to address the needs of personnel directly impacted because of the event. The initial responding police officers all attended a mandatory critical incident stress debriefing. The additional officer wellness resources available to all employees were reviewed and reiterated with personnel via internal messaging.

To address the needs and concerns of the larger community, Town Hall meetings were held with the TPD Command Staff to address ongoing the status of the investigation, ongoing public safety concerns, and develop collaborative efforts that would improve the sense of safety that had been shattered as a result of the shooting.

STRENGTHENING OUR PILLARS

WELLNESS

Law enforcement partners including HCSO, FBI, ATF, FDLE, FHP, SAO 13th Judicial Circuit, and the Florida AG Office all offered to provide any assistance needed, whether investigative or wellness-focused, to assist in the aftermath of this critical incident. While the TPD has one Victim's Advocate, the Florida Office of the Attorney General Victim's Advocacy Unit offered to provide any assistance needed for victims, families, and witnesses of the tragedy.

While the TPD will review with the TPD Victim's Advocate to determine if the TPD Victim's Advocacy program needs expansion, we will also facilitate partnership attendance with the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay for any community meetings that may have a critical incident component to ensure immediate connection to available resources for community members as well as first responders.

Critical events can leave lasting physical and emotional scars and it is important to ensure all those involved in, or impacted by, any critical incident are connected, promptly, with any mental health resources or counseling services they may need. Those who experience or witness a critical event may struggle with fear, anxiety, or depression. Local business owners, community members, family, and friends of those who were impacted in any manner by the events of October 29, 2023, are encouraged to play a vital role in their healing by offering support and encouraging them to seek professional help if needed.

IN CLOSING

The tragic events of October 29, 2023, left our entire community shaken. Every member of the Tampa Police Department shared in the grief that followed. We also understand the need for answers. As transparency is even more crucial in the aftermath of a critical event, this Community Debrief was developed to provide you with detailed information regarding your police department's response and investigation of the mass casualty incident, as well as some ways we can all build on our long-standing partnerships to reduce the chance of this ever happening in our city again.

While we continue working to bring all those responsible to justice, it is also time for a deeper conversation. We understand the fear this tragedy generated, but fear alone will not solve the issue. The Tampa Police Department is committed to working with you, our community, in any endeavor that makes our city safer. Addressing crime in the long term requires us to all look deeper in developing collaborative approaches. To truly work to make Tampa safer together, we need your partnership. By reporting suspicious activity, attending neighborhood watch meetings, hosting Front Porch Roll Calls, and having open and direct conversations with officers, you are helping to ensure a safer environment for everyone. By fostering trust and communication, proactive Community-Oriented Policing paired with community involvement makes it harder for criminal activity to develop.

We must all work to prevent young people from being drawn into violence. Together, we need to invest in programs that promote opportunity, education, and mentorship for our youth. The Tampa Police Department, along with parents, guardians, role models, community organizations, social services, and schools, must ensure that there is a strong network of cooperative support that guides our youth toward a productive path in life.

We need to encourage and ensure that safer gun ownership and more secure gun storage reduces the chance of guns ending up in the hands of those who should not have them or those with criminal intent.

The Tampa Police Department will always be here for you and will answer every call for those in need. By working together, we can ensure a safer future where our children can grow and thrive, and the fear of crime is removed for everyone in our community. In partnership, we can create a more resilient community and continue to make Tampa safer, together.

COMMUNITY DEBRIEF: MASS CASUALTY INCIDENT

October 29, 2023

Tampa, Florida



LEE BERCAW, CHIEF OF POLICE