



Leading the Way 2025-26 Tour

HENNEPIN COUNTY REPORT

HIGHLIGHTING WHAT WORKS

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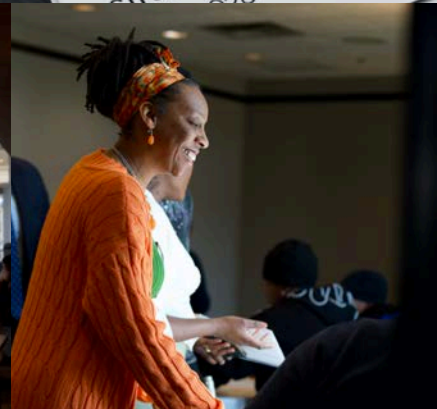
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LETTER FROM CITIES UNITED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: **AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Dear Hennepin County Leaders, Partners, and Community Members,

On behalf of Cities United, I want to acknowledge the leadership, commitment, and continued investment demonstrated across Hennepin County as it works to strengthen a more coordinated and community-centered approach to public safety. The Leading the Way (LTW) Tour made clear that this work is grounded in both deep community commitment and an emerging infrastructure for ecosystem development. A recognition that sustainable reductions in violence require not only programs and services, but stronger alignment across systems, jurisdictions, and leadership structures over time.

Hennepin County stands at an important point in its ecosystem development journey. Spanning six targeted sessions from May to October 2025, the Local Officials United Leadership Academy gathered regional leaders to engage in ecosystem mapping, explore cross-sector partnership integration, and discuss ways to measure public safety success beyond traditional crime data. Additionally, leaders utilized this collaborative space to analyze public safety budgets, evaluate funding streams, and begin drafting their comprehensive public safety strategies.

Building on the momentum of the Academy, the tour captured how theoretical alignment has begun translating into actionable progress. Through the work of Safe Communities and broader countywide planning efforts, the county has already begun laying important groundwork for a more coordinated approach to violence prevention, intervention, stabilization, and healing. The Safe Communities Strategic Plan and Phase I stakeholder engagement process demonstrate a clear commitment to strengthening partnership, improving coordination, and building a public safety ecosystem rooted in prevention, youth connection, and equitable community outcomes. The tour occurred during a period where much of that infrastructure is beginning to take shape, while questions related to alignment, implementation, communication, and shared ownership remain central to the work ahead.

Across multiple days of dialogue, reflection, community visits, and strategic discussions, the LTW Tour engaged county leadership, local jurisdictions, community-based organizations, violence intervention practitioners, educators, young leaders, and system partners in meaningful conversation about how Hennepin County's public safety ecosystem is currently functioning and where opportunities for deeper coordination exist. These conversations affirmed several important strengths, including trusted community-based leadership, growing cross-sector relationships, strong youth-centered prevention efforts, and increasing recognition that long-term safety requires a more connected ecosystem approach.

The tour also highlighted important momentum already underway across the county. Stakeholders described expanding conversations around ecosystem coordination, violence intervention collaboration, youth engagement, and shared planning efforts through Safe Communities and related initiatives. Community organizations continue to serve as critical stabilizing forces within neighborhoods, while young leaders brought important clarity and honesty to conversations around safety, trust, mentorship, and belonging. Their reflections reinforced the importance of grounding public safety strategies in the lived experiences of those closest to the impact of violence.

Building on this foundation, the tour also identified opportunities to strengthen the next phase of work. Participants consistently noted that while meaningful activity is happening across Hennepin County, coordination between systems, jurisdictions, and leadership structures remains uneven. Conversations surfaced challenges related to fragmented communication, inconsistent engagement from elected leadership, competition among organizations operating within constrained funding environments, and uncertainty around how broader ecosystem efforts connect across the county. Stakeholders also emphasized the need for stronger pathways to integrate young people into decision-making processes in ways that feel sustained, authentic, and actionable.

This report reflects what was heard and learned throughout the Leading the Way Tour. It offers both a snapshot of current conditions and a forward-looking perspective on how Hennepin County can continue strengthening alignment, implementation, and shared accountability across its evolving public safety ecosystem.

The recommendations are designed to support both immediate priorities and longer-term ecosystem development, with an emphasis on coordination, communication, sustainability, community partnership, and young leader voice.

Cities United is honored to continue walking alongside Hennepin County during this next phase of work as a partner committed to strengthening ecosystems, supporting implementation, and advancing community-centered safety. The foundation for meaningful progress is already present across the county. With continued focus on alignment, relationship-building, and shared ownership, Hennepin County is well positioned to deepen coordination and build a more connected and sustainable approach to public safety over time.

Sincerely,

Anthony D. Smith

Executive Director, Cities United



INTRODUCTION

Hennepin County is in a period of transition where public safety activity is substantial, but ecosystem alignment is still evolving.

Across the county, there is visible investment in violence prevention, youth engagement, stabilization services, and broader community safety efforts. Community-based organizations are deeply active within neighborhoods. County leadership has initiated strategic planning efforts through Safe Communities. Local jurisdictions are investing in violence intervention and prevention strategies. Young leaders, practitioners, and frontline organizations continue working to support communities most impacted by violence.

At the same time, stakeholders consistently described a system that is not yet functioning as a fully coordinated ecosystem. Communication across jurisdictions remains uneven. Participation from some system partners and elected leadership is inconsistent. Community organizations often operate within environments shaped by both collaboration and competition. Young people continue to express a desire for deeper connection, stronger mentorship, and more authentic inclusion in decisions impacting their lives.

It was within this broader context that Cities United conducted the Leading the Way Tour in Hennepin County, the seventeenth stop on a national tour that began in April 2025 and was designed to visit jurisdictions working to strengthen comprehensive public safety ecosystems.

THE LEADING THE WAY TOUR SEEK TO:

- Highlight effective and community-centered public safety practices.
- Strengthen collaboration across sectors and jurisdictions.
- Amplify community and youth voice.
- Identify opportunities for deeper coordination and implementation.
- Support jurisdictions working toward more comprehensive approaches to community safety.
- Assess and strengthen meaningful young leader engagement.

Throughout the engagement, Cities United met with elected officials, county leadership, community-based organizations, violence intervention practitioners, law enforcement representatives, educators, and young leaders through facilitated conversations, listening sessions, interviews, tours, and strategic discussions.

The engagement occurred during an important moment for Hennepin County's broader ecosystem development efforts. Safe Communities has already begun advancing a countywide strategic planning process focused on violence prevention, youth connection, partnership development, and equitable community safety outcomes.

That existing work matters because it demonstrates that Hennepin County has already established meaningful infrastructure for ecosystem development. The LTW Tour did not reveal a jurisdiction lacking effort or planning. Instead, it revealed a county actively attempting to move from isolated and programmatic approaches toward a more connected ecosystem model capable of sustaining long-term impact.

Across the materials reviewed and discussions held during the tour, Hennepin County appears to be operating in **Phase 2 of the Cities United Roadmap: Constructing a Multi-Year Plan of Action**. The county has important infrastructure in place and visible momentum across Safe Communities, city-level efforts, community-based work, and youth engagement. The next opportunity is to strengthen countywide alignment so the work becomes more coordinated, more accountable, and easier to sustain across multiple municipalities.

This report reflects what was heard throughout the Leading the Way Tour and is intended to provide a strategic assessment of:

- The current public safety landscape across Hennepin County.
- Grounded strengths already present within the ecosystem.
- Persistent barriers limiting coordination and implementation.
- Emerging opportunities for deeper alignment.
- Strategic recommendations to strengthen ecosystem development moving forward.

The goal of this report is not simply to document activity, but to help clarify how Hennepin County can continue building toward a more aligned, sustainable, and community-centered public safety ecosystem.

UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE

Hennepin County's public safety landscape reflects a jurisdiction with substantial community assets, growing ecosystem infrastructure, and strong engagement from organizations and leaders working to improve outcomes for communities most impacted by violence. Across the county, local governments, community-based organizations, violence intervention practitioners, educators, public health leaders, and young people are actively engaged in prevention, intervention, and stabilization efforts designed to improve safety and strengthen community well-being.

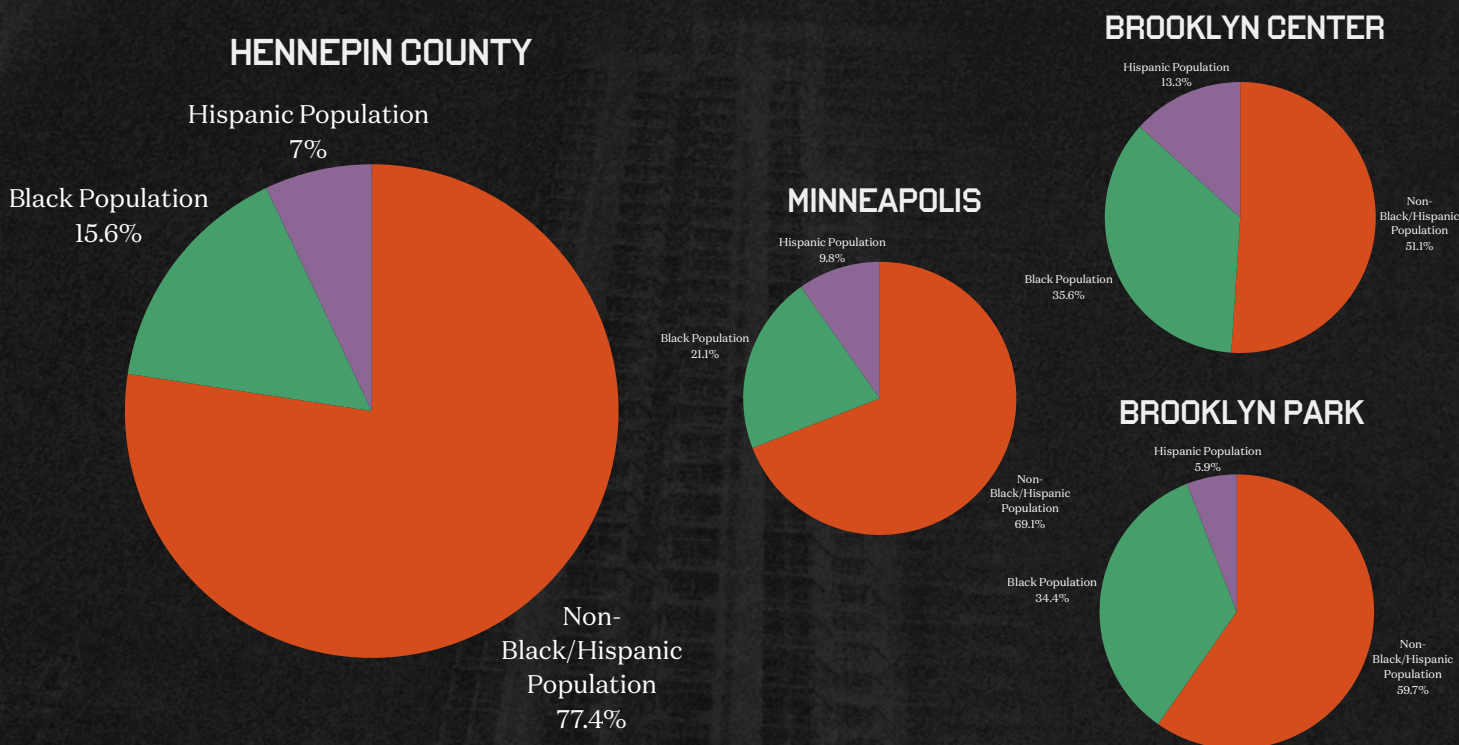
The landscape is not defined by a lack of effort or investment. Rather, it reflects the complexity of coordinating across multiple jurisdictions, systems, and leadership structures while attempting to build a more connected countywide approach to public safety.

The Leading the Way Tour took place during a broader period of strategic planning and ecosystem development already underway through Hennepin County Safe Communities. The county's Safe Communities Strategic Plan outlines a long-term vision centered on violence prevention, relationship-building, youth engagement, equitable access to safe environments, and stronger collaboration with community partners. The planning process included stakeholder engagement sessions involving county departments, community violence prevention providers, neighborhood coalitions, Joint Community Police Partnership leaders, and organizations supporting individuals impacted by violence, domestic abuse, and exploitation.

That existing planning work provided important context for many of the conversations that emerged throughout the tour. Stakeholders consistently acknowledged that there is meaningful infrastructure being built to support ecosystem development. At the same time, many participants expressed uncertainty around how various efforts connect, how coordination functions across jurisdictions, and how broader alignment will be sustained over time.

Demographic and violence data reviewed during the tour stop reinforced the importance of maintaining strategies rooted in the communities most impacted by violence. Black residents represent approximately 15.6% of Hennepin County's overall population, while Black residents account for approximately 21.1% of Minneapolis' population, 35.6% of Brooklyn Center's population, and 34.6% of Brooklyn Park's population (Census, 2024). Participants repeatedly connected these demographic realities to the importance of ensuring prevention and intervention strategies remain community-centered and responsive to local conditions.

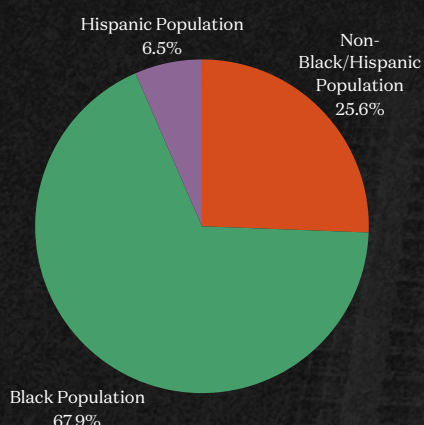
POPULATION BREAKDOWN



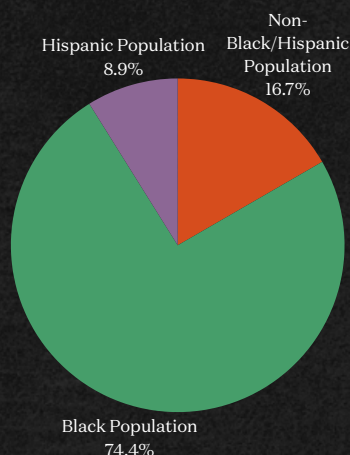
A defining feature of the local landscape is the relationship between Minneapolis and broader countywide efforts. Throughout multiple conversations, stakeholders described Minneapolis as central to both the county's violence trends and the public narrative surrounding safety. Participants acknowledged that the city's size, visibility, and political dynamics significantly shape how safety challenges and solutions are experienced across the county. At the same time, tensions related to coordination, ownership, and political alignment surfaced repeatedly throughout the tour. Several participants noted that community members often do not distinguish between city and county government and instead experience both as interconnected parts of the same system.

The urgency of that coordination was reinforced through homicide trends reviewed during the tour. Between 2015 and 2023, Black residents accounted for approximately 67.9% of homicide victims countywide, and in 2023 alone represented approximately 74.4% of homicide victims in Hennepin County ([Minnesota Violent Death Reporting System \(MNVDRS\) Dashboard](#)). Participants consistently connected these disparities to the need for sustained investment in prevention, intervention, healing-centered approaches, and long-term stabilization support.

**HENNEPIN COUNTY HOMICIDE VICTIMS
(2015–2023)**



**HENNEPIN COUNTY HOMICIDE VICTIMS
(2023)**



Beyond Minneapolis, the broader county landscape reflects both strong local leadership and varying levels of participation across suburban and smaller jurisdictions. During discussions with elected officials and community partners, several participants emphasized that violence and public safety concerns are increasingly affecting suburban communities, even while resources and visibility remain concentrated elsewhere. Stakeholders from smaller jurisdictions expressed interest in being more consistently included in countywide planning and ecosystem conversations.

Community tours throughout North Minneapolis, Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, and South Minneapolis further illustrated the complexity and diversity of conditions across the county. Participants highlighted both neighborhood strengths and persistent challenges tied to housing instability, concentrated poverty, opioid addiction, trafficking, youth disconnection, food access, and uneven investment patterns. At the same time, the tour showcased strong community assets, including recreation centers, wellness spaces, cultural institutions, violence prevention programs, youth programming, and grassroots organizations actively supporting residents.

Community-based organizations emerged as one of the strongest and most visible components of the ecosystem. Throughout the engagement, organizations were described as highly trusted within the community and deeply engaged in supporting young people and families through mentorship, violence interruption, healing work, workforce support, food access, housing stabilization, and crisis response. Participants consistently acknowledged that many organizations continue filling critical gaps even while navigating funding pressures and evolving expectations around collaboration and coordination.

Educational and justice-system conditions also shaped many conversations throughout the tour. School discipline data reflected significant racial disparities across multiple districts serving Hennepin County. In Brooklyn Center Community Schools, Black students represented approximately 40.29% of enrollment while accounting for approximately 80% of disciplinary actions. In Minneapolis Public Schools, Black students represented approximately 25.95% of enrollment while accounting for approximately 65% of disciplinary actions ([MN Department of Education](#)). Stakeholders consistently emphasized that these conditions cannot be separated from broader conversations around safety, prevention, and long-term community well being.

District Name	Black Student Enrollment	Hispanic/Latino Student Enrollment	Share of Disciplinary Actions Involving Black Students	Share of Disciplinary Actions Involving Hispanic/Latino Students
Minneapolis Public School District	25.95%	22.97%	65%	12%
Anoka-Hennepin School District	16.60%	7.42%	39%	9%
Osseo Public School District	26.57%	10.60%	70%	8%
Brooklyn Center Community Schools	40.29%	23.97%	80%	7%
Robbinsdale Public School District	30.31%	18.22%	65%	10%

Young people emerged as one of the clearest and most important voices throughout the Leading the Way Tour. During the Young Leader Collective session, participants spoke openly about violence, trust, mentorship, belonging, and the realities shaping their daily experiences. Their reflections moved beyond programming and pointed toward deeper needs related to connection, consistency, emotional safety, and long term support.

Young leaders repeatedly discussed the absence of safe spaces for older youth and young adults, particularly for Black men over 18. Participants described wanting adults who would walk alongside them rather than only intervene during moments of crisis. Others discussed feeling desensitized to violence, disconnected from systems, and uncertain about how to access opportunities that were supposedly available to them.



MOMENT THAT MATTERS

“Safe spaces that you can go to with friends don't exist for older young folks.”

(Young Leader Collective Participant)

This reflection highlighted a broader opportunity within Hennepin County's ecosystem. While programs and services exist across the county, young leaders consistently emphasize the importance of spaces and relationships that feel sustained, trustworthy, and designed with their realities in mind. Their feedback reinforced that long term public safety strategies must include not only crisis intervention, but also belonging, mentorship, healing, and real community connection.

Taken together, Hennepin County's local landscape reflects a jurisdiction with meaningful community assets, active ecosystem planning, and strong engagement from organizations and practitioners working toward safer communities. The next phase of work will likely require continued focus on strengthening coordination across jurisdictions, deepening political and system level ownership, and building the structures necessary to help existing efforts operate more cohesively across the county.

Grounded Strengths

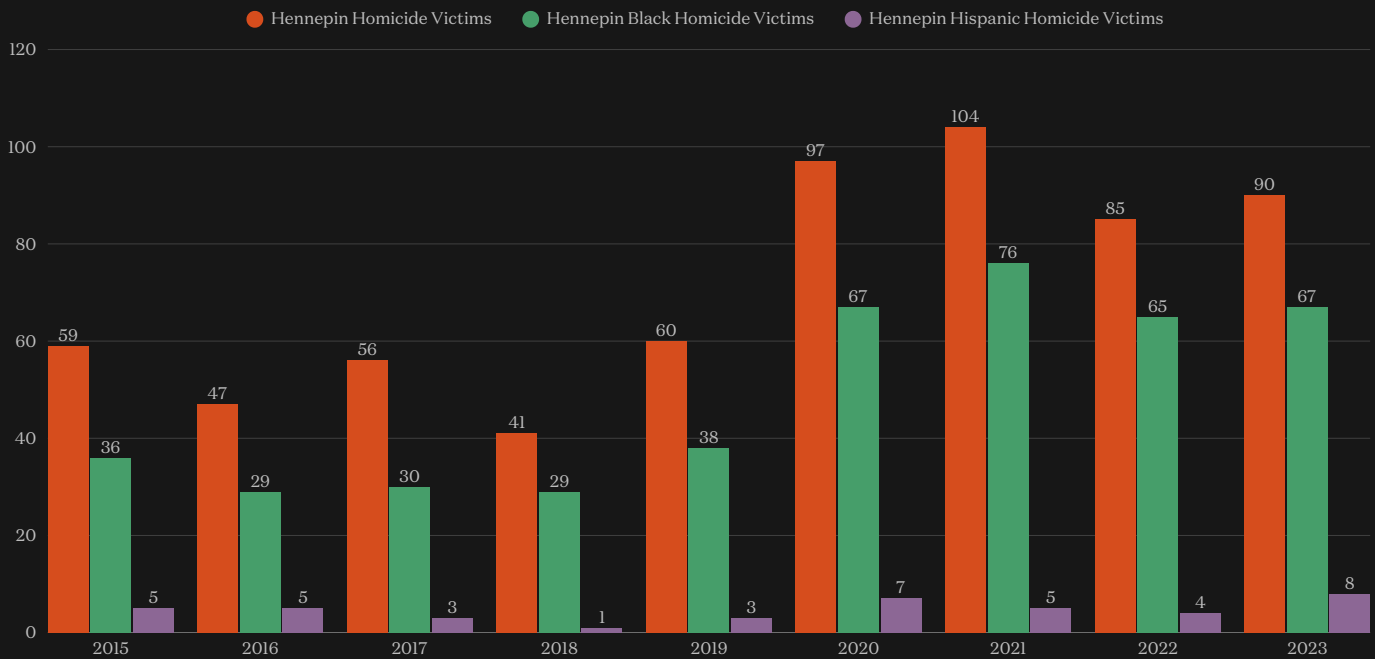
Hennepin County's public safety ecosystem is supported by several grounded strengths that provide a meaningful foundation for continued ecosystem development and long term community safety efforts.

One of the clearest strengths throughout the Leading the Way Tour was the depth of commitment demonstrated by community based organizations across the county. Organizations were consistently described as trusted, responsive, and deeply connected to the neighborhoods they serve. Many are actively supporting young people and families through violence interruption, mentorship, food access, workforce support, healing centered engagement, crisis response, housing assistance, and relationship-building. Participants repeatedly acknowledged that community organizations are often the first entities residents turn to during moments of instability or crisis.

Community tours throughout North Minneapolis, Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, and South Minneapolis highlighted the breadth of neighborhood based assets already operating across the county. Participants pointed to recreation centers, youth programs, violence prevention organizations, cultural spaces, wellness centers, community healing events, food programs, and grassroots initiatives designed to meet both immediate and long-term community needs.

The role of these organizations has become especially important within the context of violence trends. Homicide counts increased sharply across Hennepin County between 2019 and 2021 before beginning to stabilize in subsequent years. Throughout discussions, participants consistently pointed to the role community organizations and violence intervention practitioners have played in helping stabilize neighborhoods and maintain trusted relationships during periods of heightened violence and uncertainty.

HOMICIDE TRENDS IN HENNEPIN COUNTY



Source: [Minnesota Violent Death Reporting System \(MNVDRS\) Dashboard](#)



MOMENT THAT MATTERS

“Community based organizations are working to build within community despite apparent silos across city/county efforts.”

(Stakeholder Reflection)

This moment reflects one of Hennepin County’s clearest strengths and most important opportunities. Community based organizations are already doing the relational, on the ground work needed to support residents, stabilize neighborhoods, and respond to harm. At the same time, their impact is limited when city and county systems operate in silos or when coordination is inconsistent. Strengthening the connection between community led work and government infrastructure will be essential to building a public safety ecosystem that residents can see, feel, and trust.

Another important strength is the county's growing infrastructure for ecosystem development and strategic coordination. Through the Safe Communities Strategic Plan, Hennepin County has already established a framework centered on violence prevention, relationship building, youth engagement, equitable access to safe environments, and stronger partnership with community organizations. The county completed a discovery process involving seven stakeholder engagement sessions with county departments, violence prevention providers, neighborhood coalitions, Joint Community Police Partnership representatives, and organizations serving individuals impacted by violence and exploitation.

The plan reflects important ecosystem thinking already underway across the county, including five strategic goals: strengthening community safety partners; improving youth connection to caring adults and opportunities; increasing equitable access to safe environments; improving transparency and coordination across government and philanthropy; and strengthening workforce sustainability.

The Safe Communities team itself reflects a meaningful asset within this infrastructure. Coordinators are building sustained relationships with contracted providers, visiting programs regularly and troubleshooting alongside organizations to improve outcomes. Post tour interviews showed that Hennepin County's provider support is rooted in relationship building, not just contract management. Stakeholders described consistent communication, shared problem solving, and genuine partnership as important parts of the county's current role in the ecosystem. This relational approach matters because trust is built before a crisis happens, making it easier for partners to coordinate quickly when urgent community needs arise.

Conversations throughout the tour also reflected growing willingness across sectors to collaborate more intentionally around violence prevention and community safety. Participants referenced recent violence intervention convenings, Safe Communities meetings, and emerging conversations around ecosystem mapping and coordination. While participants acknowledged that alignment remains uneven, there was clear recognition that long-term safety requires stronger partnership across jurisdictions, systems, and organizations.

Youth engagement emerged as another significant strength throughout the tour. Young leaders participated openly and thoughtfully during facilitated sessions, community dinners, and group discussions. Their willingness to engage honestly around violence, mentorship, civic participation, trust, and opportunity reflected both resilience and a strong desire to contribute meaningfully to improving conditions within their communities. Multiple young leaders emphasized the importance of credible messengers and mentors who understand their lived experiences and remain engaged over time.



MOMENT THAT MATTERS

“I appreciate y'all for this opportunity for my voice to be heard as a Black man. I feel like a lot of Black men voices ain't heard a lot.”

(Young Leader Collective Participant, Community Dinner)

This moment reinforced the importance of creating spaces where young people feel seen, valued, and genuinely included in conversations about safety and community conditions. Throughout the engagement, young leaders consistently demonstrated insight, honesty, and readiness to contribute to broader ecosystem conversations.

Together, these strengths reflect a county with substantial community leadership, growing ecosystem infrastructure, engaged young people, and a strong foundation for deeper coordination moving forward. The work already underway across Hennepin County demonstrates that there is meaningful capacity and commitment present throughout the ecosystem. The opportunity ahead is to continue strengthening alignment, communication, and shared implementation across those existing efforts.



PERSISTENT CHALLENGES: WHERE ALIGNMENT AND CAPACITY STILL NEED STRENGTHENING

As Hennepin County continues advancing broader ecosystem development efforts, the Leading the Way Tour also surfaced several persistent challenges impacting coordination, implementation, and long term sustainability across the public safety landscape.

These challenges do not reflect an absence of work, leadership, or commitment. Rather, they reflect the realities of attempting to align multiple jurisdictions, systems, political structures, and organizations operating within different priorities, capacities, and experiences.

One of the strongest themes throughout the tour stop was the need for more consistent political leadership and shared ownership across jurisdictions. Participants repeatedly described meaningful work taking place throughout Hennepin County, but also noted that ecosystem coordination remains difficult when elected leadership engagement is inconsistent or varies significantly across cities and agencies.

These dynamics surfaced most clearly in conversations related to Minneapolis and broader countywide coordination efforts. Stakeholders discussed challenges tied to political transitions, procedural barriers, public trust following 2020, and inconsistent participation from some leadership structures. This context is especially significant given that Minneapolis and Hennepin County became central to national and local efforts to redefine public safety following the murder of George Floyd. Participants described how procedural policies sometimes make it difficult for county staff to directly engage elected officials, creating additional barriers to coordination, shared planning, and sustained cross-jurisdictional alignment.

Several stakeholders noted that community organizations and frontline practitioners often feel responsible for repeatedly pushing leaders to engage while simultaneously carrying the burden of responding to violence within their communities.

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

“Community is done asking for them to show up and care about the cause.”

This reflection captured a broader sense of fatigue that surfaced throughout the tour stop. Participants consistently acknowledged that stronger ecosystem alignment will require more visible, sustained, and shared participation from political leadership and system partners across the county.

The tour also surfaced ongoing challenges related to coordination and sustainability across community based organizations. Participants consistently described organizations that are deeply trusted within community and actively supporting residents, while also operating within environments shaped by funding uncertainty, uneven communication, and competition for resources. Several discussions reflected concern that organizations are often expected to collaborate while simultaneously competing for limited funding and visibility.

Participants also described uncertainty around ecosystem roles, duplication of effort, and limited clarity regarding how organizations, county systems, and jurisdictions connect within the broader safety landscape.

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

“Two brains are smarter than one, it should be organic.”

Roadmap Participant

This reflection reinforced a broader desire for stronger coordination and relationship driven collaboration across the ecosystem. Participants repeatedly emphasized that sustainable violence prevention work requires intentional communication structures, trust building, and long term partnership rather than isolated or transactional engagement.

The tour also highlighted the need for stronger information sharing across the ecosystem. In a county as large and complex as Hennepin, organizations may be doing closely aligned work without always having full visibility into one another’s efforts, resources, or partnership opportunities. Participants described a desire for clearer communication channels, more consistent convening structures, and easier ways for frontline organizations to stay connected to countywide opportunities. Strengthening these pathways would support better coordination, reduce duplication, and help community partners more easily activate one another’s resources when urgent needs arise.

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

“A lot of programs are there, but we don’t always know how to get to them or if they’re really for us.”

Young Leader Collective Participant

This reflection highlighted an important challenge within the ecosystem. While supports and services exist across Hennepin County, young leaders consistently described barriers related to communication, accessibility, trust, and long term connection. Their feedback reinforced the importance of designing systems that are not only available, but also relational, culturally responsive, and easier for young people to navigate.

Taken together, these challenges reflect a county with strong community assets and meaningful ecosystem momentum, while also highlighting the need for deeper coordination, stronger implementation structures, and more sustained alignment across jurisdictions, systems, and leadership. The opportunity ahead is not to build entirely new work, but to strengthen the relationships, communication pathways, and shared accountability necessary to help existing efforts operate more cohesively across Hennepin County.

EMERGING MOMENTUM: SIGNALS OF READINESS FOR ALIGNMENT

Even amid the coordination challenges described throughout the tour, Hennepin County's ecosystem reflects meaningful forward movement that deserves recognition and investment. This momentum is rooted in the people and organizations already doing the work: violence interveners, street outreach workers, youth workers, community-based providers, county partners, and local leaders who continue to show up for residents in moments of need.

One meaningful sign of progress is the growing coordination among violence intervention partners. Post tour interviews described existing relationships among violence interveners, street outreach workers, youth workers, and community based providers as an important part of the county's response capacity. Those relationships have helped partners communicate during urgent moments, identify who can respond in specific areas, and connect families and communities to support in real time.

Practitioners are also taking steps to strengthen coordination among themselves. K.B. Brown, Executive Director of Project Refocus, described a meeting of violence intervention workers in and around the Broadway corridor where partners discussed how to collaborate more consistently, share information about their services, and develop a simple resource guide so teams could better connect residents to the right supports. This kind of practical coordination reflects a clear readiness among frontline organizations to move from informal relationships toward more consistent communication and shared problem solving.



MOMENT THAT MATTERS

“It kind of relit some of the fire that we needed, today we had a meeting of some of the violence intervention workers that are working in and around Broadway, and that came about because of Cities United.”

K.B. Brown, Executive Director, Project Refocus

This moment matters because it points to the strength and readiness already present among community based practitioners. The energy did not begin with the tour, it was already there in the relationships, commitment, and day-to-day work of people responding to community needs. The opportunity now is to support that momentum with stronger communication pathways, clearer resource navigation, and structures that help community-led coordination connect more fully to the broader public safety ecosystem.

Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center have also demonstrated growing institutional investment in violence prevention infrastructure. Brooklyn Park has continued developing its violence prevention infrastructure in partnership with the county, and Brooklyn Center was repeatedly described as an important suburban jurisdiction within the broader county safety landscape. These conversations indicate that the ecosystem is expanding beyond Minneapolis, even as coordination challenges across that broader geography remain.

The Safe Communities Strategic Plan itself represents significant momentum. It provides a structure through which Hennepin County can move from activity toward alignment, especially if the plan's goals are connected to clear ownership, coordinated implementation, shared metrics, and sustained communication. The discovery process, stakeholder engagement sessions, and emphasis on protective environments, caring adult relationships, youth skills, and partner capacity provide a foundation for the next stage of work.

Young leader engagement also signals readiness for deeper alignment. Young people did not simply participate, they named the conditions that make them feel safe, the gaps that make support hard to access, and the forms of adult presence they need. Their feedback repeatedly pointed toward long term mentorship, proximity, safe spaces for young adults, credible messengers, accessible language, and opportunities close to home.



MOMENT THAT MATTERS

“That's the one thing that us as young people ask for. For the more seasoned to have faith in us.”

Young Leader Collective Participant, Community Dinner

This comment reflects more than appreciation. It names a core design principle for the next phase of Hennepin County's safety work, young people need to experience public safety systems as relational, trustworthy, and invested in their future, not only as programs or responses activated after harm occurs.

There is also momentum in how safety is being defined across the county. During the elected leaders session, participants described public safety as access to jobs and programs, the ability to thrive without fear, pathways between communities, a cohesive ecosystem, relationships and supports, and the ability not to have to think about safety. These definitions reflect a broader understanding that safety is not limited to enforcement. It includes belonging, stability, opportunity, accountability, connection, and community well being.

Taken together, these signals point to a system that is ready for its next phase. The willingness to collaborate is present. The recognition of shared responsibility is growing. The opportunity now is to translate that readiness into structures and practices that support sustained alignment.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS: WHAT COULD SLOW OR UNDERMINE PROGRESS

As Hennepin County works to strengthen alignment across its public safety ecosystem, several strategic considerations emerge that could slow progress or limit long term impact if not addressed intentionally.

One of the most significant considerations is sustainability. Hennepin County has made meaningful investments in Safe Communities, community based providers, and violence prevention infrastructure. At the same time, participants described budget constraints, changing funding conditions, and pressure on organizations that are expected to respond to complex community needs while navigating uncertain resources. If funding is short term, inconsistent, or disconnected from shared outcomes, even effective strategies may struggle to continue without interruption.

A second consideration is the impact of competition for resources on collaboration. The tour surfaced repeated concerns that organizations are being asked to collaborate while also competing for the same limited dollars, visibility, and recognition. This tension can weaken trust, limit information sharing, and reinforce silos across organizations that otherwise share common goals. More opportunities to collaborate or play on each other's strengths instead of competing is key.

Another key consideration is political alignment across the county. The relationship between Minneapolis and broader countywide efforts surfaced repeatedly, as did challenges engaging some elected officials and law enforcement leadership. Participants were clear that a countywide ecosystem cannot depend only on staff-level coordination or community organizations pushing from the outside. Elected leadership, city leadership, county leadership, public safety agencies, and community partners must share responsibility for the work.

A fourth consideration is the balance between immediate response and long term investment. The urgency of violence, crisis response, and stabilization can make it difficult to invest consistently in prevention, mentorship, youth spaces, workforce pathways, and healing centered supports. Yet young leaders and practitioners repeatedly named those upstream and relational supports as central to long term safety.

Finally, alignment between data, narrative, and lived experience remains critical. Hennepin County has access to demographic, education, homicide, unemployment, income, and justice system data. However, participants emphasized that data must be used in ways that support shared understanding, targeted investment, and accountability without flattening community experience. Young people and community partners repeatedly surfaced realities that may not be fully visible in dashboards alone, including fear, distrust, informal networks of support, and barriers to accessing services.

At its core, the risk facing Hennepin County is not a lack of effort or commitment. It is the possibility that, without intentional alignment, the county will not fully realize the potential of what has already been built. The opportunity moving forward is to address these considerations directly, ensuring that the ecosystem is not only active, but coordinated, sustainable, and positioned for long-term impact.

HENNEPIN COUNTY: SAFETY & EQUITY SNAPSHOT

Hennepin County is a large and diverse countywide public safety ecosystem shaped by multiple municipalities, county systems, community-based organizations, violence intervention practitioners, educators, law enforcement partners, young leaders, and public health leaders. The county has visible assets and growing infrastructure through Safe Communities, but violence and safety outcomes remain uneven across race, geography, age, and system involvement.

Population and Demographics

- Black residents represent approximately 15.6% of Hennepin County's overall population.
- Black residents represent approximately 27.1% of Minneapolis' population.
- Black residents represent approximately 35.5% of Brooklyn Center's population.
- Black residents represent approximately 34.6% of Brooklyn Park's population.
- Participants emphasized that strategies must remain responsive to the communities and jurisdictions most impacted by violence.

Economic Conditions

- Unemployment and household income data reviewed during the tour showed disparities across race and age.
- Hennepin County's overall unemployment rate was presented as approximately 4.1%.
- The unemployment rate for Black residents was presented as approximately 9%.
- The unemployment rate for Black boys ages 16-19 was presented as approximately 29.88%.
- The unemployment rate for Black men ages 20-24 was presented as approximately 18.45%.
- Median household income was presented at approximately \$95,000 overall, compared with approximately \$43,000 for Black residents and approximately \$67,000 for Hispanic residents.

Education

- Education data reviewed during the tour showed significant disparities in school discipline across multiple districts serving Hennepin County.
- Minneapolis Public Schools: Black students represented approximately 25.95% of enrollment and approximately 65% of disciplinary actions.
- Brooklyn Center Community Schools: Black students represented approximately 40.29% of enrollment and approximately 80% of disciplinary actions.
- Osseo Public Schools: Black students represented approximately 26.57% of enrollment and approximately 70% of disciplinary actions.

Economic Context

- Economic disparities were discussed as part of the broader safety landscape, not as separate from it.
- Participants connected unemployment, income gaps, school exclusion, and access to opportunity with long-term safety outcomes.
- Stakeholders emphasized the need to align workforce development, mentorship, youth engagement, and prevention strategies.

Public Safety Infrastructure

- Hennepin County Safe Communities provides a growing countywide structure for violence prevention and ecosystem development.
- The Safe Communities Strategic Plan 2025-2028 includes goals focused on community safety partners, youth connection, safe environments, transparent support and resource allocation, and workforce sustainability.
- The Joint Community Police Partnership, violence intervener convenings, city-level efforts, community-based organizations, and youth-serving programs all represent parts of the current ecosystem.
- Stakeholders described the need for clearer ecosystem mapping, role clarity, and communication pathways across these assets.

Equity Consideration

- Data reviewed during the tour showed that Black residents, especially young Black men and boys, are disproportionately impacted by homicide, school discipline, unemployment, and broader system inequities.
- Participants also discussed the importance of recognizing Hispanic and Indigenous populations within local data and engagement, particularly given the county's diversity and the realities affecting immigrant and Native communities.
- Equity must be treated as a design principle, not only an outcome measure.

Community Assets

- Community-based organizations are deeply embedded in neighborhoods and provide violence interruption, mentorship, healing-centered support, food access, housing stabilization, workforce support, crisis response, and relationship-building.
- Community tours highlighted recreation centers, wellness spaces, cultural institutions, youth programs, food programs, and grassroots efforts.
- These assets are essential to any countywide public safety ecosystem because they hold trust and proximity with residents most impacted by violence.

Data and Equity Considerations

- Data should be used to target resources, support accountability, and guide learning.
- Data should be paired with lived experience from young people, community-based organizations, and practitioners closest to the work.
- Future reporting should verify outstanding dollar figures and any unconfirmed investment amounts before public release.
- Hennepin County should consider building a shared data and learning structure that connects demographic, education, violence, workforce, and justice-system data with community-defined indicators of safety and well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

FOR CITIES UNITED SUPPORT

The following recommendations are grounded in what was heard throughout the Leading the Way Tour, the Hennepin County draft report, the data brief, the notes, the transcripts, and post-tour interviews. They are organized into immediate action steps, longer-term recommendations, and opportunities for Cities United support.

IMMEDIATE ACTION STEPS (3-6 MONTH PRIORITIES)

1. CLARIFY ECOSYSTEM ROLES, OWNERSHIP, AND DECISION-MAKING ACROSS COUNTYWIDE PARTNERS.

Establish a clearer shared understanding of who is responsible for what across Safe Communities, city level efforts, community based organizations, law enforcement partners, education partners, youth serving organizations, philanthropy, and elected leadership.

Why it matters: Participants repeatedly described uneven coordination, inconsistent leadership engagement, and uncertainty about how efforts connect. Role clarity will reduce duplication, strengthen accountability, and make the ecosystem easier to navigate.

2. ESTABLISH AN ACTION ORIENTED COUNTYWIDE COORDINATION STRUCTURE FOCUSED ON IMPLEMENTATION.

Build on existing Safe Communities meetings and violence intervener convenings by identifying a consistent coordination structure with clear purpose, membership, decision making authority, follow-up expectations, and accountability for implementation.

Why it matters: Hennepin County has many active partners, but participants described gaps in follow through and alignment. A coordination structure focused on execution can help move the ecosystem from conversation to shared action.

3. STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION PATHWAYS AND RESOURCE NAVIGATION FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

Develop a shared communication and resource navigation process that makes it easier for organizations, practitioners, young people, and families to know what supports exist, who provides them, and how to access them. This could include a regularly updated resource guide, referral pathways, partner map, and communication protocols.

Why it matters: Young leaders and community partners described uncertainty around available programs and resources.

4. IDENTIFY 3-5 SHARED PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR THE NEXT SIX MONTHS.

Building on the Phase I findings by bringing a broader group of partners together to confirm a small set of shared near-term priorities and move them into action. Priorities should include clear timelines, lead partners, and measurable indicators of progress. Potential areas of focus could include young adult safe spaces, coordinated communication among violence interrupters, engagement with smaller jurisdictions, re-engagement of elected leaders, and development of a shared resource navigation tool.

Why it matters: Participants described substantial activity across the county, but activity alone does not guarantee alignment. A small set of shared priorities can build momentum and demonstrate visible progress.

5. FORMALIZE YOUNG LEADER ENGAGEMENT IN ONGOING PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION.

Create consistent, compensated roles for young people in planning, implementation, evaluation, and communication. Young leaders should not only be invited to share feedback, they should help shape decisions, define success, and communicate strategies to peers.

Why it matters: Young leaders brought clarity, urgency, and practical insight to the tour. Sustained engagement will help ensure that strategies remain grounded in the realities of those most impacted.

6. RE-ENGAGE ELECTED OFFICIALS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERSHIP THROUGH MULTIPLE PATHWAYS.

Develop a coordinated outreach strategy that uses county leadership, Cities United, community partners, and constituents to engage elected officials and law enforcement leaders. Outreach should acknowledge procedural barriers while also making clear that ecosystem participation is necessary for long term public safety.

Why it matters: Participants repeatedly named inconsistent engagement from elected officials and law enforcement leadership as a barrier. A stronger strategy can shift participation from optional to expected.

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

(12+ MONTH PRIORITIES)

1. DEVELOP A FULLY INTEGRATED COUNTYWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY ECOSYSTEM

Align prevention, intervention, interruption, response, healing, stabilization, reentry, youth development, workforce, education, and community engagement efforts into a clearly defined countywide ecosystem. This ecosystem should include mapped pathways, shared goals, role clarity, referral processes, and implementation structures across jurisdictions.

Why it matters: Hennepin County's challenge is not lack of effort. It is the need to connect strong individual efforts into a coordinated whole.

2. BUILD A COORDINATED AND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING STRATEGY

Develop a funding strategy that aligns county, city, state, philanthropic, and private resources around shared ecosystem priorities. The strategy should reduce competition that undermines collaboration, support flexible and long term funding for trusted community based organizations, and include capacity building support for smaller or grassroots providers.

Why it matters: Participants described funding uncertainty, competition, and pressure on organizations doing frontline work. Sustainable funding is essential for trust, retention, and consistent service delivery.

3. CREATE AN INTEGRATED DATA AND LEARNING SYSTEM ACROSS PARTNERS

Develop shared data practices that connect system data with lived experience and community defined indicators of safety. This system should support learning, course correction, transparency, and accountability across partners rather than functioning only as a compliance or reporting tool.

Why it matters: Hennepin County has access to important data, but participants emphasized that data must be connected to what communities are experiencing and to decisions about resources, strategy, and implementation.

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

(12+ MONTH PRIORITIES)

4. STRENGTHEN WORKFORCE CAPACITY AND SUSTAINABILITY ACROSS THE ECOSYSTEM

Invest in the people doing the work, including violence interrupters, outreach workers, mentors, youth workers, community-based leaders, and Safe Communities staff. This includes training, wellness supports, fair compensation, supervision, peer learning, and pathways to retain experienced practitioners.

Why it matters: The work is emotionally and operationally demanding. Without workforce sustainability, the ecosystem will remain dependent on a small number of overextended people and organizations.

5. EXPAND YOUNG ADULT SAFE SPACES, MENTORSHIP, AND OPPORTUNITY PATHWAYS

Invest in safe, accessible, culturally responsive spaces and sustained mentorship models for young adults ages 18-24, particularly Black young men and others most impacted by violence. Connect these spaces to workforce development, education, healing supports, leadership opportunities, and credible messengers.

Why it matters: Young leaders repeatedly named the lack of safe spaces and sustained adult support for older youth and young adults. These gaps are directly connected to prevention, belonging, and long-term safety.

6. STRENGTHEN SMALLER JURISDICTION INCLUSION IN COUNTYWIDE PLANNING

Create intentional pathways for suburban and smaller jurisdictions to participate in countywide ecosystem planning, resource conversations, and implementation structures. This includes jurisdictions where violence is emerging or shifting, even if visibility and funding remain concentrated elsewhere.

Why it matters: Participants noted that safety concerns are increasingly affecting suburban communities, while resources and visibility often remain concentrated in Minneapolis. A countywide ecosystem must account for movement across city boundaries.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIES UNITED SUPPORT

Cities United is well positioned to support Hennepin County through targeted technical assistance, strategic facilitation, peer learning, and implementation support that strengthens coordination and sustainability across the ecosystem.

1. ECOSYSTEM ALIGNMENT AND ROLE CLARIFICATION

Cities United can facilitate an ecosystem mapping process that identifies existing partners, roles, services, gaps, referral pathways, communication channels, and opportunities for alignment across prevention, intervention, response, healing, and stabilization.

2. IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY COACHING

Cities United can support Safe Communities and partners in translating strategic priorities into concrete implementation plans with lead partners, timelines, accountability structures, and learning loops.

3. YOUNG LEADER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Cities United can support the design of sustained young leader engagement structures, including compensation models, leadership development pathways, decision-making roles, and peer communication strategies.

4. COMMUNICATION AND SYSTEM NAVIGATION SUPPORT

Cities United can provide tools and examples from other jurisdictions to help Hennepin County improve resource navigation, communication protocols, shared messaging, and access pathways for young people, families, and providers.

5. SUSTAINABILITY AND FUNDING STRATEGY SUPPORT

Cities United can facilitate conversations with county, city, philanthropic, and community partners to support aligned funding strategies that reduce competition, strengthen capacity, and support long term investment in trusted organizations.

6. PEER LEARNING AND CROSS-JURISDICTION EXCHANGE

Cities United can connect Hennepin County with peer jurisdictions facing similar challenges around countywide coordination, city/county alignment, violence intervention collaboration, youth engagement, and public safety ecosystem development.

7. ELECTED LEADER AND SYSTEMS ENGAGEMENT SUPPORT

Cities United can help design and facilitate engagement with elected officials, law enforcement leadership, and other system partners in ways that clarify expectations, reduce political barriers, and strengthen shared ownership.

Conclusion:

Aligning a Strong Ecosystem for Greater Impact

Hennepin County moves forward from the Leading the Way Tour with a strong foundation, a clear understanding of its challenges, and a growing readiness to strengthen how its public safety ecosystem functions in practice.

The tour affirmed that Hennepin County is not lacking in effort, commitment, or community leadership. The county has invested in Safe Communities, developed a strategic plan, built relationships with community partners, and supported violence prevention efforts across multiple jurisdictions. Community based organizations bring trust and proximity to the work. Young leaders bring honesty, urgency, and clarity about what safety requires. Practitioners and system partners are already working to stabilize neighborhoods, respond to harm, and build pathways toward prevention.

At the same time, the tour made clear that the next phase of work must focus on alignment. **Hennepin County's ecosystem is active, but not yet fully coordinated. Strong programs and relationships exist, but they do not always function as one connected system.** Political participation is uneven. Communication pathways remain unclear. Funding conditions can create competition. Young adult safe spaces and mentorship supports remain insufficient. Data is available, but must be better connected to lived experience, implementation, and accountability.

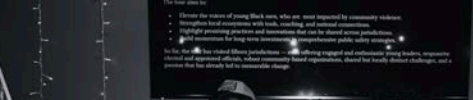
The path forward is not to start over, but to strengthen what already exists:

trusted community organizations, Safe Communities infrastructure, violence intervener coordination, youth voice, suburban engagement, and growing recognition that public safety must be comprehensive, equitable, and community centered.

The LTW Tour created space for Hennepin County leaders, practitioners, young people, and community partners to pause, reflect, and name both the promise and the pressure of this moment. It also surfaced immediate opportunities to build stronger connective tissue across the ecosystem: clearer roles, shared priorities, coordinated communication, sustained youth engagement, and stronger political and system level ownership.

Cities United leaves this tour stop with a clear sense of what Hennepin County is capable of. The assets are present. The relationships are real. The infrastructure is growing. **What is needed now is the will, the coordination, and the sustained ownership to bring those pieces together into something more than the sum of its parts.**

Cities United is committed to walking alongside Hennepin County in that next phase. The work is not done, but the foundation for meaningful progress is already here.





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