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Alvin L. Parks Jr.  
Mayor  
City of East St. Louis  
301 River Park Drive  
East St. Louis, Illinois 62201

Dear Mayor Parks:

I urge you to take immediate steps to address conditions that breed violence in the city of East St. Louis and to ensure all residents, including those living at East St. Louis Housing Authority (ESLHA) properties, live in a safe and secure community.

East St. Louis' crime rate is one of the highest in America. According to a June 2011 article in the Belleville News-Democrat, East St. Louis' murder rate is 20 times the national average for its population size. According to statistics reported by the Illinois State Police, in 2009 East St. Louis had a population of less than 29,000, but had 1,348 reported aggravated assaults, 905 burglaries, 265 robberies and 42 criminal sexual assaults. It is simply unacceptable for families in any American city to live under these conditions.

I have worked closely with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to implement increased security measures at ESLHA properties. Because the ESLHA is in HUD receivership, I have asked HUD to step up efforts to prevent crime on and around ESLHA properties. HUD recently decided to implement several enhanced security measures including the hiring of an ESLHA security coordinator, the installation of security cameras, lighting and fencing and the implementation of a ban and bar policy in coordination with the U.S. Attorney and State's Attorney. These are necessary first steps to ensuring safety and security for the 4,636 residents of ESLHA properties.

I have asked the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to make crime reduction efforts in East St. Louis an urgent priority by providing additional resources for the Working Against Violent Elements (WAVE) Task Force. The WAVE Task Force was created in 2009 to help supplement local law enforcement efforts and includes the FBI, ATF, U.S. Marshals Service, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Illinois State Police, the St. Clair County Sheriff, and the St. Clair County State's Attorney's Office. The WAVE Task Force has made more than 1,900 arrests, seized more than 335 firearms and led to more than fifty prosecutions at the federal level.

I am committed to working with federal agencies to ensure federal funding is targeted to reduce crime in East St. Louis. HUD recently transferred the administration of federally funded Community Development Block Grant Program and HOME Program funds from the City to St. Clair County so that this funding will be used for much needed community and economic development, including the demolition of hazardous, crime-attracting structures.

While state and federal resources are being directed to target crime in East St. Louis, it is vital that you, as the Mayor of East St. Louis, do your part to address the conditions that contribute to criminal activity in the city.

It is imperative that the leadership of East St. Louis put the safety of East St. Louis residents before the interests of the liquor stores, night clubs and other establishments that attract crime. Simply put, the nightclubs and the liquor sales need to end at a reasonable hour. Liquor stores near ESLHA properties that are open into the early morning hours and nightclubs that cater to customers leaving nightclubs in St. Louis in the early morning hours attract disruptive behavior and sometime violent crime to ESLHA properties as well as surrounding areas.

In the last six months of 2011 alone, according to news reports, there were at least four incidents of violent crime in or near East St. Louis clubs:

- On August 28, 2011, two unknown men shot two men walking home from Jo Jo's Night Club. Police were called at 4:40 a.m.
- On September 18, 2011, Timothy C. Johnson was shot and killed by an unknown gunman at Phoenix nightclub after an argument and large fight broke out. Police were called at 3:46 a.m.
- On September 24, 2011, Brandon Davis was shot multiple times when leaving the rear of Denese's Place when a man began chasing him. The man shot a female club patron twice and a security guard once. Police were called at 2:25 a.m.
- On November 12, 2011, a 47-year old man was shot by police after he reportedly refused to put his assault-type weapon down outside an East St. Louis nightclub. Police were called at 9:30 p.m.

These are only a few examples of the many violent crimes that the residents of East St. Louis face on a regular basis, with most of them occurring in the early morning hours.

Clubs and liquor stores in East St. Louis should close at 11:00 p.m. during the week and 1:00 a.m. on weekends, and they should be required to increase security on the premises as a condition of staying in business. Security cameras should be in surrounding parking lots, metal detectors should be operational at all entrances, and security guards should work with the WAVE Task Force and local police to reduce violent crime inside and outside these establishments. If these establishments are allowed to remain in the community, they have a responsibility to ensure the community is safe for their customers as well as local residents. While East St. Louis may receive revenue from these establishments, the price of violent crime is too high a price to pay for the families that call East St. Louis home.

I will continue to work with federal, state and local officials to reduce crime in East St. Louis. I urge you to become a partner in this effort by prioritizing the safety of East St. Louis residents.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator