

Brooklyn District Attorney Sets Sights High for 2012

D.A. Hynes: We Are Going to Clean Up Brownsville, Expand 'Safe Stop,' 'Safe Surrender,' and 'Back on Track'

By Samuel Newhouse
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JAY STREET — Kings County District Attorney Charles J. Hynes has his eyes set on a goal that some might consider impossible: he wants to clean up Brownsville.

"We are moving inevitably to set up a second community court in Brooklyn — to recreate the miracle of Red Hook," D.A. Hynes told the *Eagle* recently. "I look forward to Brownsville as being proof positive you can take the most dangerous neighborhood in the city and do the same thing that we did in Red Hook."

Hynes, who was re-elected to his sixth term as Brooklyn District Attorney in 2009, has famously held office while crime rates from Red Hook to Fort Greene plummeted a remarkable 200 percent since he took office in 1990.

Now, he sees one of the most important tasks of his office as instituting educational, re-entry programs in Brownsville and eventually helping to build a community courthouse.

"All I need is a judge, a desk and two flags and I'll supply the rest," Hynes joked — although that is actually what he told the U.S. Department of Justice when requesting funding for the Red Hook Community Justice Center.

Red Hook was formerly one of the city's most violent neighborhoods.

"Parts of it were worse [than Brownsville]. They have this wonderful view of the waterfront

and you couldn't sit in the park without being fearful of being hit by a stray bullet," Hynes said.

Now, Hynes said, it is considered one of the 15 safest places in the city, with an Ikea furniture store, Fairway grocery store and a cruise terminal. Many of these companies hire teenagers from housing projects in Red Hook.

"If you can do it in Red Hook, you can do it in Brownsville. You can do it anywhere," Hynes said.

Brownsville, along with East New York and Cypress Hill, are among the most violence-plagued neighborhoods in the city. There were 26 murders, 28 rapes, and 528 robberies in 2011 in the 73rd precinct, which consists of Brownsville and Ocean Hill, according to NYPD statistics.

But in line with what D.A. Hynes called "a changed dynamic for a prosecutor's office," Hynes intends to bring the same programs that have helped clean up most of Brooklyn to Brownsville.

"There's always going to be some place where you have more crime, and Brownsville is the leader," Hynes said.

He intends to address that problem by creating a new re-entry program to assist juveniles in Brownsville who have tangled with the law become functioning members of society.

The D.A.'s timeline? In three years, a Brownsville Community Court will be under construction, he hopes.

Nixon in China

In Brownsville, the Back on Track re-entry, rehabilitation, and

education program for young males is key to long-term crime reduction, Hynes said.

"Juveniles have a 78 percent recidivism rate within three years," Hynes pointed out. "The institution [of juvenile detention facilities in New York], objectively speaking, is an obscenity for the government. They're ticking time bombs with no reentry skills."

Many juveniles undergo physical, mental or sexual abuse at juvenile detention facilities, Hynes said. They're often exposed to drugs. They return to their neighborhoods with little chance of employment and soon return to drugs or crime.

Hynes hopes to stop that cycle in part by relying on the model of ComALERT, a program for adult inmates returning to their communities, which has been studied and found a success by Harvard University.

Lexington, Kentucky district attorney Ray Larson, a long-time skeptic, has adopted re-entry programs.

"That's Nixon going to China," Hynes quipped.

"There's no substitute for having a prosecutor running a program," Hynes said of re-entry programs, "because I have the key to their jail cell, and I'm fully willing to throw them in there at any time."

'Safe Surrender' and 'Safe Stop'

Hynes was frank about the fact that members of the African-American community in Brook-



Kings County District Attorney Charles J. Hynes

lyn have little faith in the criminal justice system.

"Last year, 250,000 Brooklynites received a 'C-summons' [criminal court summons] for minor infraction, from riding a bike on the sidewalk to having an open can of booze or being after hours in a park," Hynes said. "Many of them fail to show up in court and have an arrest warrant issued."

In these situations, Brooklynites fearing the courts are left trapped out of the mainstream by their pending warrants — they can't apply for jobs due to background checks and they can't comfortably drive a car, for example.

So, "Safe Surrender" was set up with Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood of St. Paul Community Baptist Church in East New York, who "set up a court inside his church" to allow Brooklynites from Brownsville and East New York to come to a local church, see a judge, and have their summonses resolved — usually with just a small fine or having community service hours issued.

The first "Safe Surrender" event in June 2010 attracted 77 people. "Not particularly successful," is how Hynes described it. But the second such event in April 2011 saw 425 people come in to have summonses dismissed. A third one brought another four hundred people. So, about 1,000 people "have now returned to the mainstream," as Hynes put it, thanks to "Safe Surrender" — and more importantly, because the community has accepted the program.

"Safe Stop" is another of Hynes' programs, whereby local merchants place a decal on their doors letting children, seniors and women know they can enter the store and safely call 311 or 911. There are about 77 Safe Stop locations throughout Brooklyn, including 45 in Sunset Park.

"Safe Stop Boro Park" is the same program specifically being developed in the Orthodox Jewish communities of Brooklyn.

Hynes said he hopes that in the future there will never be repeat-

know if the state and country's flagging economy could interrupt his programs or his plans for a cleaner Brownsville. But if that ever does happen, he already has several other ideas for how the state can save money by putting resources into rehabilitating Brooklynites rather than just incarcerating them.

"The waste in so-called correctional facilities — so-called because corrections corrects nothing — is tremendous," Hynes said. "We over incarcerate in this country, with more people in jail than Saudi Arabia, Iran and the People's Republic of China. ... The governor visited a juvenile detention facility upstate with 100 staff members and no inmates. It's madness."

Hynes claimed that as much as 40 to 50 percent of the inmates on Rikers Island may not pose legitimate flight risks or threats to the community. They could be tracked with GPS ankle bracelets, rather than housed, clothed and fed by the city for months.

Another idea Hynes mentioned concerns ACDs (adjournments in contemplation of dismissal), which many defendants charged with minor crimes receive after 24 to 36 hours in a holding cell at Brooklyn Criminal Court. ACDs allow defendants to have charges dropped if they don't get into trouble for a period of time, usually six months or a year.

Hynes asked, why can't ACDs be offered at police precincts immediately after arrests are made?

"Put the cops back on the street, give defendants a piece of paper," he said. "Can you see the incredible impact on relations between people of color and police it would have? ... It would save money and be a good community relations tool."

Prevention and re-entry will continue to be Hynes' top priorities, because even with crime rates at their lowest since the 1940s, there's still miles to go before "no mother has to be tortured the way my mother was tortured, and no kid has to see what I saw when I was 5 years old" said

Supreme Court Calendar

Kings Co. Criminal Term
320 Jay St., Brooklyn

Hon. Mondo: sentence
ΔWinston Cox

alt. murder

Hon. Mondo: sentence

ΔNefriti Earl

robbery

Hon. D'Emic: pretrial

ΔDaniel Elias

murder

Hon. Di Mango: pretrial

ΔTrevor Mann

assault

Hon. Marrus: pretrial

ΔNelson Morales

ΔLamont Pride

ΔKevin Santos

ΔAriel Tejada

ΔMichael Velez

murder

Hon. Di Mango: pretrial

ΔKysheen Oliver

assault

