

Residents rally for an end to 'culture of violence' in Paterson

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PATERSON — Residents rallied Tuesday through the Fourth Ward to speak out against violence that claimed two lives and wounded two others in the area over the last three months.



Members of Band Against Neighborhood Destruction marching through the Fourth Ward to bring attention to recent shootings in Paterson.

The rally started at a gathering on Broadway for relatives of Darrin Mason, 24, who was killed on July 20. Around 35 men and a few women walked from the Integrity Masonic Temple to churches and community events in the Godwin Avenue area, calling for an end to a culture of violence that they blamed for a string of recent shootings in the neighborhood.

The event marked the start of a new neighborhood campaign against violence and drug-dealing, which residents say have haunted the Fourth Ward for the last five years.

“Elderly people are afraid to come out of their homes,” said Ken McDaniel Jr., the creator of Band Against Neighborhood Destruction, or BAND, one of 10 groups that helped organize the event. “They see young men dealing drugs ... they feel captive. We allowed a culture of violence to get worse gradually over the years.”

McDaniel said that BAND and the other groups, which include the Nation of Islam Study Group and the Neighborhood Assistance Office, hope to curb the violence in the months ahead through youth outreach and vocational training.

The rally comes after police arrested a 17-year-old who has been charged with four shootings over the past three months. The Paterson police arrested him on July 28 at his 12th Avenue home for an unrelated parole violation, said Detective Lt. Ronald Humphrey.

The residents walked from Broadway across Auburn and Godwin avenues, passing the sites of several of the recent shootings. Mason, 24, was shot on July 20 while he was in a minivan near Rosa Parks Boulevard and Godwin Avenue. Police found Asan Jones, 33, riddled with bullets and lying on the ground near the same intersection on June 28. He was later pronounced dead at St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center.

Kim Freeman, a high school teacher who has lived in the area, gave a grim tour as the rally passed corners spotted with boarded-up windows.

"That block over there, the police came and did a drug raid," Freeman said. "They must have arrested half the people that live here. Be careful over there. Walk on the street and not on the sidewalk. Those are drug dealers on that block."

A 55-year-old woman who is related to Mason by marriage said she also lost her son through violence five years ago.

"I know what [my sister-in-law] is going through – I'm going through it all over again being here," said Jeannette McCoy, who faults police for not finding her son's killers. "He was a guy in the streets selling drugs. But he didn't deserve to get gunned down in the hall like a dog."

The rally coincided with National Night Out, an evening of events in cities around the county aimed at promoting safer neighborhoods.

As the residents stopped by a church on Auburn Avenue, a community organizer remembered the alleged shooter, whom he said he has known since he was born.

"You have [members of his family] all up and down these blocks," said Al Moody, director of youth services for [Paterson](#).

Was Moody surprised that a boy he knew since he was a baby may have shot four people?

"Yes and no," he said. "When I first started working with young people, we were worried about the lack of respect for authority and rules. But in the last six or seven years, the concern for young people is the lack of respect for life."

Police have not identified the suspect, who was charged as a minor.