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Boston clergy call on mayoral candidates to discuss police reform after 73-year-old grandmother shot dead on Dorchester porch



BOSTON MA. APRIL 13: Rev. Eugene Rivers III , in the wake of the killing of a 73-year-old grandmother, calls for a ll mayoral candidates to participate in a public format discus ways to handle the violence during a press conference on April 13, 2021 in Boston, MA. At left is Rev Jack Ahern. (Staff Photo By Nancy Lane/MediaNews Group/Boston Herald)



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Boston clergy are demanding mayoral candidates step up and explain their police policies amid calls to better protect neighborhoods after 73-year-old Delois Brown was caught in the crossfire of escalating street violence and shot dead on her Dorchester porch on Saturday.

“There’s a line in the sand and there now must be a public reckoning, and we’re going to advance that reckoning,” the Rev. Eugene Rivers III said speaking on the steps of the Ella J. Baker House in Dorchester on Tuesday. “We’re making every person that is a candidate for mayor to explain and justify their policies.”

“This horrific act must shock us into engaging in a serious, evidenced-based discussion of policing policy,” Rivers continued. A time and date have yet to be decided, but Rivers said a panel would include Professor Christopher Winship of Harvard University and Dr. Jacqueline C. Rivers, a Harvard University lecturer and member of the Violence Reduction Taskforce Steering Committee.

Rivers pointed out what he called a “false dichotomy” forcing his community to choose between reforming police and protecting poor neighborhoods where violence is on the rise.

“There’s this idea somehow that Black people can’t walk and chew gum,” the longtime Reverend and anti-violence advocate said. “We’re against the bad cops and we’re for good cops and better funding is better than no funding.”

Mayoral candidate and Councilor Annissa Essaibi George said she would “absolutely” be in attendance at the forum. The former Boston educator said she is not in favor of “defunding” the police — a stance fellow councilors and candidates Michelle Wu and Andrea Campbell have both supported in some capacity.

“I want a clear and transparent department, but we need our city to also be safe and these two things are not mutually exclusive,” Essaibi George said.

Wu did not immediately respond to questions on Tuesday. A spokeswoman for Campbell’s campaign said she “welcomes the opportunity” to discuss her policing policies but has not yet received an invitation.



Rep. Jon Santiago, also a candidate, said he is a “yes” for the forum. Former city economic development chief John Barros, who is also running, did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Last year, acting Mayor Kim Janey, who is seeking a full term in the fall election, led a city council effort to slash \$12 million from the police overtime budget. That money has been redirected to housing and economic development programs, youth and other community-based programs, according to a breakdown from the mayor’s office, but clergy and community organizers on Tuesday said more investment is needed to combat violence.

She now takes charge of a police department in turmoil as gun violence and homicides have exploded amid the coronavirus pandemic — with fatal shootings up roughly 60% last year over 2019 numbers — and allegations of a cover-up that allowed former union boss and alleged pedophile Patrick Rose to stay on the job.

A spokeswoman for Janey’s campaign said the acting mayor has yet to receive an invite to the forum.

State Sen. Nick Collins, whose district includes Olney Street where Brown lived, said at a time when homicides and gun violence are on the rise, “calls to decrease police funding are not a winning strategy and will cause havoc and more violence in our neighborhoods.”

A [Go Fund Me](#) set up by the family on Sunday to help cover funeral costs had raised nearly \$18,000 as of Tuesday evening.

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