

# Hopkins president sets out to garner community support for a university police force



Johns Hopkins president Ron Daniels, on lower step, and BUILD volunteer Henry Coleman speak with LaKisha Jones about a proposed Hopkins police force. (Baltimore Sun)

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**C**lipboard in hand, the president of Johns Hopkins knocked on rowhouse doors in East Baltimore on Saturday to hear how residents feel about the university's revived plan to establish a police force for its three city campuses, including the vast medical complex several blocks to the south.

"I'm Ron Daniels, the president of Johns Hopkins," he said as he and members of Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development, the influential coalition of churches and community groups, approached homeowners along the 1400 block of N. Eden St. Other BUILD members conducted surveys nearby — an effort to measure local sentiment about a Hopkins police force, something that community leaders said the university should have done when it first raised the idea.

At a Baltimore City Council hearing last week, Daniels said the university plans to again ask the Maryland General Assembly for police powers. He acknowledged missteps in the way the institution initially pursued the

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idea, prompting what he called a “backlash.”

In March, **Assembly leaders did not endorse his plan**, and the leader of the city’s delegation to Annapolis said Hopkins had not established sufficient community support.

Daniels tried to correct that Saturday by participating in a BUILD-organized “listening session” at Knox Presbyterian Church. He sat in the front pew and heard several community leaders and BUILD volunteers express concerns about Hopkins having, within five years, 100 sworn officers assigned to the Homewood and Peabody Conservatory campuses, as well as the medical complex in East Baltimore.

A typical concern: Once Hopkins establishes a police force and its campuses become safer, crime will move to other areas of the city.

Regina Hammond, **who organized ReBuild Johnston Square to revitalize that east-side neighborhood**, expressed concern about a “spillover” as Hopkins police officers push crime away from the streets around the hospital. “Crime will move to unsecured communities while Hopkins becomes more secure,” she said.

Pauline Charles, a resident of Darley Park, expressed the same fear and asked Daniels for assurances that a Hopkins police force would work with Baltimore police to prevent crime from spreading to areas of the city already experiencing problems.

Some speakers used the opportunity to complain generally about crime in their neighborhoods, if well beyond the streets a Hopkins police force would patrol.

Celena Owens, a homeowner in Oliver, said she frequently hears gunshots in her neighborhood. “We’re tired of the drug markets and violence near a liquor store,” she said.

LaKisha Jones, one of the residents Daniels met while knocking on doors, told the Hopkins president she favored the university having a police force because it was bound to help deter crime. More immediate to her home on Eden Street, Jones said, was the need for better street lighting. While that would be a project for the Baltimore City Department of Transportation, Daniels made a note of it.

Speaking inside the church, the Hopkins president said crime was an urgent problem in Baltimore. “We all know what a cloud it puts over the prospects for the city,” he said, noting a high rate of armed robberies near Hopkins campuses during a three-month period last year.

He said he was convinced that the university needs its own police.

“But we recognize that things have changed when it comes to perceptions of policing in America,” he said. Other universities have had police departments for years, he said, but, in 2018, those institutions would face the same questions and demands for accountability that Hopkins has had to confront in trying to gain support for its plan.

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Daniels said a Hopkins police force, built with community support, could become a “demonstration project” for how to do policing right, making streets on and near Hopkins campuses safer while embracing the principles of Baltimore’s federal consent decree to protect civil rights.

“We know this is a key partnership moment,” Daniels said, and he set off to knock on doors.

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