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### **Miami Gardens Junior Council stands against neighborhood violence**

BY Wilma Hernandez

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Every other Wednesday the Miami Gardens Junior Council meets at City Hall to talk about what is affecting the youth. The top priority in several past agendas: stopping violence.

"Stop the violence has been our theme for three years, because it is still an epidemic that we face," said junior mayor Yasmin Law, 17, a senior at Carol City High.

The junior council gives students a voice of sorts in government, by allowing them to propose ideas to elected officials and plan events for Miami Gardens. But the experience also readies them for a lifetime of public service, should they choose to go that route.

Many of the students who have served in the council have gone on to college to study social sciences, said Vice Mayor Barbara Watson, who started the council in 2006. "We are attempting to groom our future leaders," said Watson.

Yasmin said the issue of youth violence is a familiar one. She noted that in the council's first year, there were seven gun-related youth deaths.

The junior council is elected every year, and is made up of 14 students -- seven from Carol City High, and seven from Norland High. They are members of the Student Government Association.

This council has a junior mayor, vice mayor, clerk, vice clerk, media specialist, police liaison, and a parliamentarian, who mimics the function of a councilwoman. But thus far, it has functioned without a junior city attorney or city manager.

At a meeting on Feb. 25, Yasmin assigned each council member to an elementary school, where they will take red construction paper for kids to trace and cut out silhouettes of their hands.

### **The show of hands will be displayed from the top of a three-story building in Tallahassee during March 29 and April 1, at the Capitol Rotunda, an open area between the state Senate and the House of Representatives.**

Last year the city took 10,000 hands for display, but this time they hope to better that number. This year's hands will be red as a symbol of the blood being shed in the community, said Watson.

"We will let Tallahassee know loud and clear that we want the violence to stop," said Watson.

Parliamentarian Tanzania Burnett, 17, said the display of elementary kids' hands will remind state officials that budget cuts affect these children's education.

Tanzania, a senior at Carol City High and vice president of Miami-Dade Schools' Student Government Association, proposed a youth rally against violence in December.

She said the holiday season and conflicting schedules delayed the rally. But after a violent shooting in Liberty City in January that left two teenage boys dead and several wounded, the junior council decided it was time to act.

"After what happened . . . we decided it was time to do it, and keep the anti-violence movement going," she said.

The council voted to hold the rally May 9 at Norwood Park. Among the details discussed: If an opening prayer would be appropriate at the rally. "They have prayers at the White House," reasoned Tanzania. The council will continue planning at their next meeting.

Serving the city has given these students one-of-a-kind opportunities, such as attending the Congressional Black Caucus conference held each fall in Washington D.C.

"We spoke to [U.S. Rep.] Kendrick Meek and [Miami-Dade School Board member] Tee Holloway about what was happening at our schools at that time, because they were about to be closed," Tanzania said.