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Mayor's message: Graffiti Task Force created

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Providence is a great city with 25 unique and vibrant neighborhoods. As the spring sets in and the days get warmer, we look forward to spending more time outdoors - walking pets, visiting with friends and neighbors, enjoying our local parks. And that is why we are doing everything in our power to protect our neighborhoods from the negative impacts of graffiti, so they remain safe, clean and inviting for all.

There is a belief that graffiti is a victimless crime or simply a public nuisance: it is not. It is a blatant assault on our neighborhoods that - left unchecked - leads only to more graffiti and a real sense of urban decay. For cities everywhere this is more than a headache, it is a mark on the great integrity of our buildings, our infrastructure, our landscape and our community.

My office took up the charge on this several years ago, creating a full-court press on graffiti and those vandals who were destroying the quality of life of our community. Through education, enforcement and eradication, we have raised awareness, reduced the seasonal problem and increased the awareness that we care about and are committed to keeping our neighborhoods clean and safe.

And now that it is officially spring, we have launched our seasonal graffiti abatement effort, once again.

Late last month, I formally launched our Graffiti Task Force effort for 2009. I created the task force with: multiple abatement teams; aggressive enforcement of anti-graffiti and vandalism laws; increasing awareness through education; offering cash rewards for information leading to the arrests of offenders, and establishing a hotline to report such vandals. We have also increased penalties up to \$1,000; requiring restitution for damages and community service; imposed criminal liability for selling or acquiring paint and similar markers to minors; established the hotline 800-TAGGERS and a website www.providenceri.com/graffiti as another site to report graffiti vandalism.

And just this month, I was pleased to join leaders of two local neighborhoods - Smith Hill and Mount Pleasant - in a joint initiative among the Smith Hill CDC, Mount Pleasant Hardware, Pittsburgh Paints and the city of Providence to announce a new effort - Erasing the Defacing.

With the help of community leaders such as these and the police and city departments, we are doing our part. But we need the public- to help us report these crimes and these offenders, so the police can stop them in their tracks. We have had a number of recent arrests - some offenders even caught in the act of vandalizing. We are reminding them: we will prosecute to the fullest extent of the law.

Please help us pass the word that graffiti vandalism is a crime, and that if you commit graffiti

vandalism and are caught damaging our neighborhoods, you will be held accountable. We all have a stake in keeping our cities clean and safe and livable.

David Cicilline is the mayor of Providence.

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