

Dear Representative,

Communities in cities across Pennsylvania are experiencing a dramatic surge in violence. Harrisburg [logged more homicides in 2020 than](#) any other time in more than 30 years. In the Northwest, Erie [continues to see a rise in shootings including aggravated assaults](#) and murders well into 2021. Shootings in the City of York, including homicides and aggravated assaults, [rose by 34 percent](#) compared to 2019. Pittsburgh has seen a [90% increase in shootings](#) compared to this time last year.

The loss of life, profound emotional and mental trauma, and safety concerns as a result of this violence have impacted victims, survivors, families and entire communities. Further, it has taken an economic toll on the Commonwealth, with one study estimating that the violence epidemic cost the City of Philadelphia more than \$500 million in 2018 in medical expenses, lost earnings, property damage and criminal justice expenses.

There is a solution. As part of this year's budget, we urge you to invest \$100 million of funding from the American Rescue Plan in the School Safety & Security Grant program run by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. This grant program creates a safer and more secure community by providing resources to schools, municipalities and community organizations for a wide variety of evidence-based approaches to reduce community violence.

Research consistently shows that community-based programs targeted towards individuals at high risk of being involved or impacted by violence can prevent the initial violence and stop its spread. The programs range in approach, including:

- School-based violence prevention programs can change how youth think and feel about violence, and enhance interpersonal and emotional skills, such as communication, problem-solving, empathy, and conflict management.¹ Effective approaches that address growing youth violence also include mentorship, creating non-punitive curfew centers, and providing jobs training.
- [Community-based programs use credible messengers](#) to identify potential violence, intervening before it occurs through targeted engagement. These programs have reduced violence by up to 45 percent in New York City and 50% decrease in shootings in Oakland.²
- Workforce development paired with support systems to provide alternative methods of conflict resolution such as the READI effort (Rapid Employment and Development Initiative). Participants are 54 times less likely to be involved in violence after joining the program than the control group.
- Hospital-based trauma informed care supports victims of violence by providing services as they recover to them and the community, halting the spread of violence.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office for the Associate Director for Policy and Strategy. (2017). [What is school-based violence prevention?](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

² Giffords Law Center, Faith in Action, & Black and Brown Gun Violence Prevention Consortium. (2019). A Case Study in Hope: Lessons from Oakland's Remarkable Reduction in Gun Violence. Giffords Law Center.

The opportunities continue well beyond that. Research consistently finds that to prevent gun violence in a sustained manner requires meaningful engagement of [residents to ensure responses match the local needs and unique situations](#). These types of programs can, with sustained funding, drive a shift in norms that will reduce violence over the long term. That is not surprising, as locals are most likely to know the key hotspots for violence, when potential conflict is flaring, and how to directly engage the most at-risk individuals through culturally competent methods.

The only thing missing for these programs to succeed is the necessary financial resources for organizations using their knowledge and experience to reduce violence in communities across the Commonwealth. With growing violence making residents and visitors more concerned than ever for their safety, chilling economic activity and damaging the quality of life, especially for younger Pennsylvanians, now is the perfect time for the Commonwealth to provide significant support for these evidence-based approaches to reduce violence.

Sincerely,

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Allegheny County District Attorney Stephen Zappala

Lancaster Interim Chief John Bey
City of Lancaster

Allegheny County Chiefs of Police Association
Chief John Sicilia

Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin Steele

Bucks County District Attorney Matt Weintraub

Northampton County District Attorney Terence Houck

Chester County District Attorney Deb Ryan

Schuylkill County District Attorney's Office
District Attorney Michael O'Pak

Delaware County District Attorney Jack Stollsteimer

PUBLIC HEALTH

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Dr. Joel Fein
The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Center
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Michelle Abel

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Crozer Health System, Trauma Medical Director

Kerry Heppen
Main Line Health, Social Worker

Robert Tessler
University of Pittsburgh Department of Surgery,
Resident Physician

Dr. Denise Torres
Geisinger, Trauma Medical Director

Loreen Evans
Crozer, Nurse

LOCAL OFFICIALS

Aliquippa Mayor Dwan Walker

Allegheny County Councilor Liv Bennett

Mayor Markus Adams
Borough Council of East Pittsburgh

Erie Mayor Joseph Schember

Jenkintown Councilperson Christian Soltysiak

Lancaster Mayor Danene Sorace

Penn Hills Councilman John Petrucci

Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto

Pittsburgh Councilman R. Daniel Lavelle

Pittsburgh Councilperson Erika Strassburger

Pittsburgh Councilman Bobby Wilson

Plymouth Township Councilperson Christopher
Manero

Scranton Mayor Paige Cagnetti

Turtle Creek Mayor Kelly Kelley

Wilkesburg Mayor Marita Garrett

COMMUNITY GROUPS

Amnesty International USA
Eve Wider, PA Area Coordinator

Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP)
Tim Stevens, Chairman & CEO

Black Women for Positive Change

Diane Powell, Chairperson

Bridget Clement
Communities In Schools Pittsburgh, Executive
Director

Bucks County Women's Advocacy Coalition

Peggy Walsh

CeaseFirePA

Adam Garber, Executive Director

Center for Victims

Laurie MacDonald, President

The Chester Community Coalition

Frances Stier, Secretary

Franklin Center of Beaver County

Cheryl King, Executive Director

Edgewood Neighbors for Gun Safety

Jo Schlesinger, Representative

Jamar Place of Peace

Wynona Harper, Founder

March for Our Lives- PA

Max Milkman, Co-State Director

McKees Rocks Community Development Corporation

Taris Vrcek, Executive Director

FAITH LEADERS

Congregation Beth Am Israel

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Deacon Clifford Johnson

Sixth Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh

Main Line Reform Temple

Margot Horwitz

Rabbi David Strauss

Main Line Reform Temple

EDUCATOR

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North Side Partnership Project

Eleanor Williams, President

Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network

Peter Kaplan Board Secretary

Progress PA

Linda Bishop, Director of Strategic Partnerships

Sandy Hook Promise

Aurora Vasquez, State Policy Director

Shayla Holmes

From the Inside Out, Program Director and Administrator

South Pittsburgh Coalition for Peace

Reverend Eileen Smith, Director

Squireel Hill Stands Against Gun Violence

Voices Against Violence

Richard Carrington, Founder & Executive Director

Association of Pittsburgh Priests

Sister Barbara Finch, Secretary

Betsy Wiest,

Sisters of St. Joseph of NW PA

UUJusticePA

Tom Buglio, Gun Violence Prevention Liaison

Vincent Kolb

Sixth Presbyterian Church, Pastor

Marci Herman

Neighbor Saver, Ower