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**Introduction:**

**Name:** Darren Smith

**Organization/Title:** Intern to State Representative Douglas McCrory of Hartford's 7<sup>th</sup> District

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**Testifying:** In support of **House Bill #6676:** "An Act Concerning Implementation of the Project Longevity Initiative on a State-Wide Basis"

To the chairs Senator Coleman, State Representative Fox, and to all of the other esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee, I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today.

**Testimony:**

Gun violence is an epidemic, and it will take more than one person, one policy, or one piece of legislation passed to rid us of a problem that is essentially imbedded in the fabric of our nation. The Project Longevity Initiative looks to have taken this into account, as it will involve members from every aspect of the communities in New Haven, Bridgeport, and Hartford in order to provide a holistic approach to this ongoing issue, something that has been lacking considerably in this battle. As a person who is educated and performs work in the social service sector, one of the most important aspects of this Initiative that I found was the intricate role social service providers will play in assisting with the educational, employment, housing, medical, and mental health needs of those looking to transition out of gang lifestyles. This method will address some of the much too often "glossed over" mental health traumas associated with engaging in a violent lifestyle, along with expose and provide alternate options for those looking for a better way to live, for as we all know, one cannot be expected to end a way of life to which they have grown so accustomed without being exposed to and/or provided alternate options.

There is data that shows this Initiative, when applied successfully and with thorough follow-through, has a positive impact on communities. According to the US. Department of Justice, after this program was implemented first in Boston, then in cities such as Chicago, Cincinnati, and Providence, it resulted in 40-60% reduction in group related homicides in certain neighborhoods. Judiciary committee member and New Haven mayoral candidate Gary Holder Winfield has already offered his support for this Initiative in his city, claiming that, in fact, it shouldn't have taken the city this long to listen to the community. Back in 2007, he and other community activists called for a similar initiative entitled the "Zero Killings" campaign, but, at the time, it was thought of as a "crazy idea." Sorry for the 6 year delay Representative Holder-Winfield, everyone can't be a visionary like yourself.

On a personal note, I attended the anti-gun violence march this past Saturday, organized by the lovely women of the Mothers United Against Violence organization. Hundreds of people participated as we marched to the state capitol, carrying a total

of 358 white crosses bearing the names of homicide victims since the year 2000. Most of these names were of young men whose race is the same as my own. Now, while I have been fortunate enough to not know anyone personally who has lost their life to gun violence, I am still an African American male, and I am very much cognizant of the dangers that have statistically been shown to be associated more with my own than with any other group. Because of this factor alone, I am 2.5 times more likely to suffer from gun violence than Latino males, and 8 times more likely than my white male counterparts.

Therefore, it is not uncommon within my culture that parents outlive their children, just as it is not uncommon that people within these communities do not assist law enforcement in an effort to solve these violent crimes, mostly in fear that their own lives will then be in jeopardy. It is for these reasons, and many more, that I offer my full support of House Bill 6676 for the Project Longevity Initiative to be implemented across Connecticut's major cities. The culture of violence and America's obsession with guns is a systemic issue that will not be cured overnight, But by launching such an Initiative, it definitely serves as a step in the right direction, for it places the power of change back into the hands of the community, exactly where it should be.