

Testimony before the Judiciary Committee

Submitted by Sasha Jay, MSW Student, UCONN School of Social Work

For HB 6676

Monday, April 1, 2013

Good day, Honorable Senators and Representatives, members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Sasha Jay. I am a MSW Candidate at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work and I speak today in the capacity of a future professional social worker, and as someone with nearly a decade of experience in the social services field, working in front-line service.

I am here today to support House Bill 6676: An Act Concerning Implementation of the Project Longevity Initiative on a State-Wide Basis. "Project Longevity" seeks to reduce gun violence and group-based violence in major cities throughout Connecticut by strategically uniting community stakeholders, law enforcement personnel, and social service providers to offer real and solid alternatives to violent groups and group members who want to break the cycle of violence, and to offer a unified front of deterrence for any future violence. I hope that you will support this legislation.

The prevalence of group-based violence, and the prevalence of gun violence in America is a well-known, and well-documented problem. The statistics are staggering and unconscionable. Many efforts in the past to "get tough on crime" have unfortunately failed. Project Longevity is different in its approach, because it is a *partnership* model, where all members of the community, including members of violent groups, have a voice and a stake in the success of this initiative. I support HB 6676 because as a social worker I know that creating partnerships, and creating engaged relationships, is how work gets done. The model used by Project Longevity creates relationships between providers, law enforcement, and communities—most importantly, it *changes* the existing dynamics within a struggling community and makes them healthier and safer.

I have personally worked with young people who were members of violent groups. There is a pervasive feeling of inevitability, and despair, that they carry with them. Many of them truly believe that this is it; this is their whole life, and they have no other viable options. As you may know, in the past the Group Violence Reduction Strategy, on which Project Longevity is based, has been implemented in major American cities such as Chicago, Boston, and Cincinnati, as well as others, where the strategies employed have resulted in a group-based homicide reduction of 40-60%. That statistic is remarkable on its own, but speaking today as a social worker, when I hear that a group-based homicide reduction rate of 40-60% was achieved, I hear that thousands of lives have been either saved, or changed forever by this model of violence reduction. I hear that young people have had the course of their lives altered for the better, I hear that brothers and sisters, parents and children, are benefitting directly from a

reduction of violence in their communities. And, I hear that young people who may have believed that a life on the streets as a member of a violent group was their *only* option, have come to realize, and be shown through Project Longevity, that this is not the case—that there are, in fact, better options for a better life. The reduction of violence in our cities is measurable not only in statistics and economics, but also in the *ripple effect* of every life changed, and every life saved through Project Longevity.

In conclusion, I respectfully strongly recommend that you support HB 6676. I thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully,

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