Good evening Appropriations Committee Members,

My name is Sharon Cromwell and I am the City Gun Violence Prevention Manager at Everytown for Gun Safety. Everytown is one of the leading gun violence prevention organizations in the United States, advocating alongside Moms Demand Action volunteers, Mayors, law enforcement and our partners in the violence prevention movement, for gun safety measures at the local, state and federal level.

Everytown is supporting full funding of Connecticut based organizations which directly tackle the issue of gun violence, a great example being an organization called Project Longevity. Project Longevity is a strong example of a smart and data-informed gun violence prevention program here in Connecticut and I am testifying today to urge the committee to make a multi-year commitment to fund Project Longevity at $1.2 million annually a top priority in this budget.

Project Longevity operates in three cities experiencing the majority of firearm homicides and assaults in the state - New Haven, Bridgeport, and Hartford. Project Longevity uses the group violence intervention model, also known as GVI of focussed deterrence.

They have repeatedly demonstrated that violence can be dramatically reduced when a partnership of community members, law enforcement, and social service providers directly engages with the small and active number of people involved in street groups and clearly communicates a credible moral message against violence, prior notice about the legal consequences of further violence, and a genuine offer of help for those who want it. This strategy helps connect individuals at highest risk of involvement in violence with the support services they need to disengage from a cycle of violence. A central method of communication is the call-in, a face-to-face meeting between group members and the strategy’s partners.

The aim of their strategy is to reduce peer dynamics in the group that promote violence by creating collective accountability, to foster internal social pressure that deters violence, to establish clear community standards against violence, to offer group members an “honorable exit” from committing acts of violence, and to provide a supported path for those who want to change.

Around the country, this model is saving lives. In Chicago, individuals who received the group violence intervention were 32% less likely to be the victim of a shooting as compared to individuals who did not receive the group violence intervention. Homicides decreased by 37% in targeted neighborhoods.\(^1\) Since Oakland launched their GVI program in 2012, the city has seen a remarkable 43% drop in homicides and a 49% reduction in non-fatal injury shootings.\(^2\) In Cincinnati, the program led to a 41% reduction in group-member involved homicides.\(^3\)

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In Connecticut, cities have been making progress in the fight against gun violence. Connecticut’s violent crime rate decreased from 2013 to 2017 (from 262 incidents per 100,000 to 228 incidents per 100,000), and violent crime is below the national average. Homicides in New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport - the three cities where Project Longevity is active - dropped from 114 in 2012 to 55 in 2016, a reduction of more than 50 percent. Violent crime has declined steadily over this same period in New Haven. In New Haven, where Project Longevity began, the number of fatal and nonfatal shootings was cut in half between 2011 and 2016. In 2017, New Haven saw record low homicides in over a decade, which was credited in part of Project Longevity by the Chief of Police in New Haven. These numbers translate into lives saved.

But guns are still killing far too many of our residents and despite the ongoing need, funding has not been consistent for Project Longevity. In recent years, the state’s fiscal deficit and delays in appropriations resulted in Project Longevity staff working without pay for more than seven months and two staff members in New Haven leaving the organization. Moving forward, we support Project Longevity in asking for the state to commit to funding the organization for at least three years so the program and the people and communities they serve are secure in knowing this lifesaving work will continue.

Safety is not an investment the state can afford to forgo from both a moral and fiscal standpoint. Gun homicides and nonfatal assaults cost the state and taxpayers millions in law enforcement, criminal justice and health care costs. The CDC estimates that gun deaths cost Connecticut about $290 million in healthcare expenses and work loss each year. This does not even begin to capture the pain of losing a loved one, or the trauma young people carry with them after witnessing a shooting or living in fear of becoming a victim of violence. These tragic incidents of gun violence disproportionately affect Black and Latino residents - who make up the majority of firearm homicide victims in Connecticut. The cost of gun violence greatly outweighs the cost of investing in evidence-based preventative programs.


Calculations based on 2010 data, Data & Statistics (WISQARS): Cost of Injury Reports. Connecticut, firearm injury-related deaths, lifetime medical costs refer to the medical costs associated with the fatal injury event. Available at https://wisqars.cdc.gov:8443/costT/

Project Longevity is a key pillar in the state’s public safety strategy. It should be resourced as such. That’s why Everytown for Gun Safety and Moms Demand Action urge you to make a multi-year commitment of $1.2 million annually in funding in Project Longevity.

Thank you.