Distinguished Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Richard Souza. I am from East Hartford. I am testifying today, March 28, 2022, in **opposition** to:

H.B. No. 5397 AN ACT DECLARING GUN VIOLENCE A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS AND ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND ADVISORY COUNCIL ON GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

OPPOSE: **H.B. No. 5397** AN ACT DECLARING GUN VIOLENCE A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS AND ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND ADVISORY COUNCIL ON GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

This bill declares that gun violence constitutes a public health crisis and will continue to constitute a public health crisis until the goal of "substantially decreasing the level of gun violence in the state is attained." Since that is a completely arbitrary number, the state will always be in a public health crisis, a literal perpetual state of emergency. The bill will also establish a new level of bureaucracy called the Office of Gun Violence Prevention, and this new office will be funded with $5,000,000 of taxpayers' money (line 128). Wasting the peoples' money with such feel-good, do-nothing legislation should be regarded as a criminal act.

We don't need any more research studies. We know what to do with current violent offenders and what is effective at lowering future violence rates. We just don't have a legislature that is willing to spend resources in the right places. Instead, it would rather make political "virtue signaling" statements. Lines 32 to 35 specifies that the government will award grants to those organizations that "have demonstrated effectiveness at reducing gun violence without contributing to mass incarceration", and that shows that the people who wrote this bill have a callous disregard for those who have been the victims of violence. Once violence has been committed, the people who committed it need to be held accountable for their actions and, if necessary, removed from society to protect the rest of us from their behavior. Better funding of law enforcement agencies, rather than passing police reform bills, would be a good start.

The heart of this bill is wrong because it seeks to gain information about how to lower violence by researching violence after the fact. Look at lines 36 to 41. "Such initiatives may include, but need not be limited to, a hospital-based violence intervention program, a group violence intervention program, an evidence-based street outreach program, a violence interruption and crisis management program, gun violence survivor outreach, mental health aftercare for gun violence survivors and any individualized wraparound services to prevent or deal with the aftermath of gun violence. "

The second mistake the originators of this bill made is using the misnomer "gun violence". Firearms are not violent. Violence is an activity committed by humans. Sometimes, humans will use tools other than their hands and feet to commit these acts, such as baseball bats, knives, motor vehicles and firearms. But if such humans were not inherently violent individuals, they would not be using these tools to commit violent actions. If gun control worked, a state like Connecticut that has enacted some of the most sweeping gun control laws in the United States would have the lowest level of violent crime. Yet, Hartford has the highest murder rate of any city in New England. Clearly, something is wrong with our state government's approach to violence reduction, and we know what's the problem. **It's not the guns; it's violent people.** How, then, do we lower the number of violent people?

Men commit violence at ten times the rate of women, and that is borne out by the ratio of men versus women in prison. Boys need a strong male figure at home, ideally a father, to teach them what it means to be a man. Yet, over 70% of black children are raised by single mothers. That is a national tragedy. Is it any surprise then, according to the FBI unified crime reporting program, that blacks comprise 13% of the US population but account for over 55% of all violent crime? However, their disproportionate crime rate has nothing to do with skin color, but rather the households and neighborhoods in which they were raised. Without a father at home, **all** boys will look for a father figure, and in a poor neighborhood, where there are a disproportionate number of black people, that figure is the local drug dealer or older members of a gang.

If you really want to change the statistics on violence, support organizations that provide good strong male figures to mentor boys who don't have fathers at home. That could be organizations such as local churches, martial arts clubs, boy scouts and outdoor clubs. Then, realize that this is a long process molding one boy into one man at a time, and commit yourselves to the task.