

Rev. Henry Brown

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Senator Looney, Representative Miner, and members of the task force, Good day.

My name is Rev. Henry Brown.

I am a victim of gun violence. On January 29, 1971, the day that I was honorably discharged from the military, my life was altered by gun violence. I was gunned down at the age of 22. After a month in a coma, my way of thinking was changed. I was angry, withdrawn, depressed, unloved, and, most of all, scared.

Thirty years later, July 23, 2001, through another act of violence, I found my purpose in life again. When I saw the bullet-wounded face of seven-year-old Takira Gaston posted on the front page of the Hartford Courant, I decided, with the help of a group of grieving mothers under God's guidance, to stand up and speak out against the violence on our streets.

On November 14, 2002, Mothers United Against Violence was founded by a group of brave women and men who put their lives on the line to be—as our mission statement states—a voice of hope in the face of violence, poverty and injustice in our community by education and advocacy in the spirit of faith, love, and solidarity. In the past 11 years Mothers United Against Violence has held hundreds of prayer vigils requested by the families of those killed—most of them as a result of the organization sponsoring visits to families as they wait to hear

the fate of their children in hospital emergency rooms. Our organization has arranged anti-violence rallies attended by hundreds of people from Hartford and other communities in Connecticut.

The mothers and families of our organization cannot, because of work and family responsibilities cannot be here to give testimony. The testimony I give here is given in their name.

In the past years three years, our annual march through the streets of Hartford to the State Capitol to speak out against violence included our carrying over three hundreds of crosses bearing the names of victims lost to gun violence. it was clear that there was an absence of public officials. It's as if our cries of anguish and grieve had fallen on deaf ears as we proclaimed "No more shooting! No more dying! No more killing in our communities!" We were advocating not only for Hartford, but for communities in our entire state.

Mothers United Against Violence works in coalition with similar groups in New Haven and Bridgeport. I have witnessed the pain of grief of mothers and families who mourn the deaths of their innocent young people gunned down in Connecticut's inner cities. In Hartford alone, since 2007, 80% of the 172 homicides were committed with guns. The families of these victims of gun violence join their grief with that of the families of Newtown. Both have already suffered long enough from the proliferation of firearms--legal and illegally obtained.

We urge this task force to propose any measures making access to guns as regulated as possible. There needs to be a requirement that a permit be owned by anyone wishing to purchase a gun or ammunition—no matter where the purchase takes place. There needs to be a limitation of assault-type weapons to military and law enforcement personnel. There is a need to eliminate high-capacity clips for any firearm.

We grieve for Newtown and also for other communities affected by gun violence. And we say to them “No one knows your pain and grief better than Mothers United Against Violence who have lost over 300 loved ones over the past 10 years. We cry for and with you. The recent tragedy in our state shows no community is immune to gun violence.”

In times of fear in trouble we should praise God for the promise contained in God’s Word. Every sentence pronounced in Scripture is a call for justice for the people most forgotten and ignored. We are called to be a prophetic voice for those voiceless. While we trust in God and his word, we work to shine the light of the ancient message of God’s justice on the events of these, our times. The violence promoted in our gun culture must be addressed.

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*John P. Wentland*

"The role of citizens in our Democracy does not end with your vote. America's never been about what can be done for us. It's about what can be done by us together through the hard and frustrating, but necessary work of self-government." Pres. Barach Obama - 11/6/12