

END THE HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS OF GUN VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES & ADDRESS THE DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT OF GUN HOMICIDES ON BLACK & BROWN COMMUNITIES

CONGRESS MUST PASS THE BREAK THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE ACT, COMMIT \$5 BILLION (625 MILLION ANNUALLY FOR 8 YEARS) TO GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS, AND ESTABLISH A NATIONAL STRATEGY TO END GUN VIOLENCE.

Certain communities disproportionately impacted by gun violence need increased support for violence intervention and prevention programs focused on interrupting cycles of violence, and increased funding for direct services- including mentorship, counseling and health care- to individuals at high risk of engaging in gun violence. Everyone has the rights to live and to feel safe, without fear of discrimination. Pervasive gun violence in communities of color threatens these human rights. The U.S. government has a duty to prevent future gun violence and to address existing and past gun violence that has wiped out entire families and left communities without safe public spaces, simply due to their area code. Research shows that evidence-based violence reduction programs are cost-effective and have been highly effective at reducing gun violence and saving lives. Further, taking these critical steps to reduce and prevent firearm homicides is not only good for our communities, it will also decrease the economic burden on our health care and criminal justice systems, quickly paying dividends for taxpayers and communities. With sustained investment into these programs, combined with a national comprehensive strategy aimed at reducing gun violence- particularly in communities of color, the U.S. can make inroads to ensuring all communities enjoy the same human rights to live and to feel safe.

“Because there is no rhyme or reason to gun violence. It is not always targeted. It can happen to anyone, anywhere at any time. To have your life senselessly taken away- and no one is even paying attention? As of today, we have lost 38 people to gun violence this year in the city of Cleveland. 38 people. We have to come up with a solution. Everyone wants data, numbers and they cut funding. No one wants to deal with it. You have to be on the front lines to know what’s going on.”

- Mar-yum Patterson, Trauma

BACKGROUND:

Communities of color have a long and complicated history of disadvantage and marginalization in the U.S., which contributes to the disparate impact of firearm homicides and injuries. Unfortunately, community-level firearm violence in the U.S. disproportionately impacts communities of color, particularly young Black men. Firearm homicide was the leading cause of death for black men and boys aged 15-34 in 2019 and the second-leading cause of death for Latino men and boys in the same age range.

The causes of gun violence in communities of color are

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multi-faceted, informed by deep-seated issues around poverty and discrimination. Patterns of persistent firearm violence can prevent access to basic services - such as health, housing, and education - while also intensifying deprivation resulting in reductions of critical services. Neighborhoods that lack economic opportunity, access to essential services, and community programs can result in young people feeling hopeless, disenfranchised and unsafe, in part due to a lack of police protection and the presence of pervasive gun violence, and in turn feeling the need to protect themselves by carrying a firearm.

WE MUST ADDRESS GUN VIOLENCE BY INVESTING IN IMPACTED COMMUNITIES

Data suggests that sustained funding for evidence-based projects, tailored for specific local contexts and working in partnership with the affected communities, can achieve significant and long-lasting reductions in firearm violence. A number of federal and state-funded violence intervention and reduction programs, and accompanying strategies, have proven effective in decreasing gun violence in communities, saving lives. That is why Amnesty International USA is calling for Congress to authorize at least \$625 million in annual investment for 8 years in effective violence intervention programs that provide group violence and hospital-based interventions along with evidence-based street outreach programs, all of which have all proved integral to reducing gun violence in communities.

By focusing efforts on a concentrated group and engaging community members in providing direct services and mentorship to individuals at higher risk of engaging in gun violence, many cities have made significant progress to reducing violence and creating safe communities. Importantly, the design and implementation of these programs must include human rights safeguards, including the right to freedom from discrimination, the right to privacy, and the right to due process.

Unfortunately, despite the significant success of these programs, a lack of funding and polit-

ical will have prevented the kind of long-term, consistent implementation these programs need to thrive. Even in cases where the models have drastically reduced gun violence, community leaders face challenges in maintaining them, sometimes leading to a devastating reversal of the program's gains, and a return to previous higher levels of gun violence.

“Gun violence is inherently tied to human rights because as a human being you deserve respect and acknowledgement and to be seen. Anything that creates trauma, abuse, and inequity- it is a human rights issue- and gun violence does that. It touches everyone.”

- Lamar Johnson, Violence Prevention Coordinator, BRAVE Youth Leaders, Chicago, Interview with Amnesty International

AIUSA RECOMMENDATIONS:

The U.S. government has a duty to take positive action to address gun violence, especially where models exist that could reduce it while making a long term and life-changing impact on systemically disenfranchised communities. To do this Congress should:

- Authorize \$625 million annually, for at least 8 years, to community gun violence prevention and intervention programs that have proven effective in decreasing gun violence in communities where there are persistently high levels of firearm violence.
 - This funding should include funding for competitive grant programs to cities that develop effective, prevention-oriented violence reduction initiatives focused on young people at highest risk for violence and funding for grants that support the creation or expansion of hospital-based violence reduction initiatives with a focus on young people at highest risk for violence.
- Pass legislation which supports the funding and implementation of evidence-based violence pre-

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vention and intervention programs, including passing the Break the Cycle of Violence Act

- Establish a comprehensive strategy aimed at reducing gun violence, particularly in communities of color.

FOR QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT:

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