



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving testimony

HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023 Department of Public Health

Appropriations Committee

February 24, 2022

Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit testimony on the Governor's proposed budget **recommendations for the Department of Public Health to support Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention Programs.**

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. As a community foundation, we manage approximately \$1 billion in assets. In the past two years, the Foundation has distributed a record-breaking \$97 million in grants to promote equitable opportunity for all residents in our region. Made possible by the gifts of generous individuals, families and organizations, the Foundation has awarded grants of more than \$894 million since its founding in 1925.

As part of our work to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latinx residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation seeks to increase the number of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods in and outside the city. Higher opportunity neighborhoods, defined by a variety of factors, include low unemployment, better performing schools, lower crime, and greater availability of quality, affordable housing stock.

[DataHaven's Greater Hartford Wellbeing Index 2019](#) reports that only 46 percent of Hartford residents say they feel safe walking around their neighborhood at night. In the inner ring suburbs, that number is 69 percent, and in the outer ring suburbs, it's 81 percent. Our work includes supporting organizations engaged in activities to increase social cohesion and promote greater community confidence in community safety in Hartford, including through activities that can reduce and prevent violence.

The Foundation recognizes the critical role the DPH could provide in addressing community violence as part of its mission to protect and improve the health and safety of people in Connecticut, including in preventing disease, injury, and disability and assuring planning for response to public health crises. The December 2021 report of the Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention Advisory Committee submitted to the Public Health and Human Services Joint Standing Committees presents our public health crisis: Nationally more than 100,000 Americans are killed or injured by gunfire every year. In 2019, the leading cause of violence for teens and adults ages 15-34 was firearm homicide. In Connecticut, on average someone is shot with a gun every day, and every other day someone is killed by gunfire. Connecticut cases have risen during the pandemic, with Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven homicides accounting for 70 percent.



Other reports have documented that in Hartford alone, there were 35 homicides as of late December 2021, representing a 40 percent increase from 2020. Four homicide victims were children, including a three-year old boy. Gun violence has a devastating impact not only on the victims and their families, but also the perpetrators and their families and the entire community. The impact of community violence, both direct and indirect, affects all of us.

We are pleased that Governor Lamont's budget includes \$3.6 million over two years in the Department of Public Health's budget to support community- and health care-based organizations working to prevent and reduce gun violence and to help design and implement anti-violence strategies and report outcomes.

These programs would respond to the sharp rise in gun homicides in Connecticut communities. Program providers engage victims and others at risk of violence to address the impact of trauma using community-based, trusted messengers to support long-term outcomes. Coordination across programs and services is a core element. Effective violence prevention also requires creating systems of reporting outcomes and information sharing, including comprehensive evaluation and shared resources for the frontlines.

The Foundation supports a variety of efforts to interrupt gun-related and other community violence in the City of Hartford. For example, we provide resources to nonprofits that provide violence prevention, trauma-informed care, and youth development and engagement. Since November 2018, the Foundation has supported several Hartford nonprofit agencies that formed the Hartford Community Safety Coalition (CSC), a collaborative effort to create healthy communities through a reduction of violence and trauma. Their efforts include trained Violence Prevention Professionals working with local hospitals to provide Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs to address community violence

In addition, the Foundation supports the recently established Brother Carl Hardrick Institute for Violence Prevention which focuses on evidence-based strategies for the prevention of gun and community violence. The Institute will train new violence intervention specialists and youth development practitioners in Greater Hartford.

In Connecticut, the relationship between poverty, race and ethnicity is intimately intertwined. Some Connecticut communities are among the most segregated by income, race, and ethnicity. Last year, the Foundation supported legislation identifying racism as a public health crisis, which included the establishment of a gun violence intervention and prevention committee.

The Foundation also supports the budget proposal's inclusion of American Rescue Plan Act funds to support the growth of existing evidence-based or evidence-informed community violence and gun violence prevention and intervention programs throughout the state. This will provide the level of support needed for a Connecticut Hospital-based Violence Intervention Program Collaborative to build new and strengthen existing partnerships between community violence prevention services organizations and hospitals across Connecticut. The Foundation is also pleased that this budget includes support for the collection of firearm and stabbing homicides and assaults data at DPH and build a data dissemination plan to share this information with state partners for focused public health prevention strategies and interventions.



The Foundation looks forward to continuing its work with policymakers, nonprofits and residents to develop effective long-term policies to ensure that all Connecticut families live in safe, healthy, and strong neighborhoods. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at policy@hfpg.org or 860-548-1888.