

**Testimony on House Bill 33
Ohio Senate Finance Committee - May 30, 2023**

SUBMITTED BY:

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Chair Dolan, Vice-Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB33-SC1901, an amendment to fund the Community Peace Builders' Network (CPBN), a community violence intervention (CVI) local development project in Cincinnati and Hamilton County. This funding will enable Cincinnati communities most impacted by gun violence to develop and implement evidence-based, public health strategies to heal the legacies of trauma, reduce future gun violence, and break the cycle of harms caused to individuals, families, communities, our city, and county.

As civil servants, legislators, and decision makers, we know you share in the concern and commitment to ensure public safety and address gun violence for our most vulnerable citizens, while alleviating the financial burden and other less easily measured costs for all. We look forward to answering any questions you may have after this presentation and are grateful for the opportunity to earn your support for this vital effort to heal our communities and students.

Tragically, not everyone grows up with the support of caring adults, and even some that do are so injured through traumatic incidents or adverse environments that healthy relationships and internalized hope remain elusive. As a result, there are young people in our city, and adults, who don't know that their lives and dreams matter, who feel like they can't trust anyone, and who live a rough and desperate existence, lacking opportunities for healing and the means to sustain a healthy livelihood for themselves and their families. And a few of these people have learned – from the guns and violence around them – that they can “resolve” their immediate difficulties by shooting people. As Mr. DeVone Boggan of Advance Peace [1] says, “a gun has become their means of conflict resolution.” It has been shown that their sense of safety and community has been severely damaged and they become the “hurt people who hurt people.” It has been studied and is now well known that gun violence offenders were often previous gun violence victims [2], and that untreated trauma too often goes on to reinforce the vicious cycle, particularly in today's impoverished, underserved, and disadvantaged communities of color.[3]

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/17/us/devone-boggan-reduce-gun-violence.html>, Feb. 17, 2023.

² “A review of the literature investigating exposure to levels of violence and children's outcomes indicates that youth who have a history of domestic and community maltreatment are more than four times likely to be arrested as a juvenile (Christoffel, Citation 1983; Ozbay & Ozcan, Citation 2007).” McGee, Z.T. et al. (2017) A multivariate analysis of gun violence among urban youth: The impact of direct victimization, indirect victimization, and victimization among peers, *Cogent Social Sciences*, 3:1, DOI: [10.1080/23311886.2017.1328772](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2017.1328772)

³ Aufrichtig A, et al. “Want to fix gun violence in America? Go local.” *The Guardian* (2017). <https://bit.ly/2i6kaKw>

As a society we depend on law enforcement to lock up those who commit gun violence. Yet despite their best efforts, in cities like Cincinnati, we average over 410 shooting victims yearly, one or two a day, and about 17% of those end in death. ***In 2021, Cincinnati's homicide rate was ranked the 11th worst in the nation at 25.6 victims per 100,000 people.*** [4]

Gun violence hurts everyone - the victim, the perpetrator, and the families and communities that love them. Accordingly, a high density of shootings can drastically limit both a family's and a community's ability to recover, heal, and progress. And then, in addition to the human and community costs, a rough estimate shows that each homicide costs taxpayers \$1.1M and each non-fatal shooting costs \$600K [5]. These costs accumulate from the crime scene, hospital bills, criminal investigation and prosecution, incarceration, victim support, and lost revenue.

Outreach-based community violence intervention (CVI) is a complementary approach to law enforcement that leverages community assets - those individuals, often formerly incarcerated people of the community, who's lived experience makes them credible messengers of understanding, healing, mentoring, guidance, and love to those closest to the violence.

"Community-based outreach has been well documented as an integral strategy for reaching historically marginalized and disenfranchised populations in multiple fields. Community-based violence intervention (CVI) approaches that utilize outreach workers—professionals who identify and engage youth and adults who have a high risk of violence involvement—have the potential to quell violence in cities around the country." [6]

Cincinnati's **Community Peace Builders' Network (CPBN)** is a newly formalized alliance of local CVI veterans who have been doing street outreach, serving their communities night and day at local homicides and shootings, each for 10 to 30 years. Mitch Morris, our senior CVI outreach worker and manager, was recently honored by the members of the Senate of the 135th General Assembly for Outstanding Attainment, a Humanitarian Award.

In addition to these credible messengers, we have two supporting former secondary school educators. One is a 5+ year leader of the Gun Violence Prevention Working Group at Cincinnati's Christ Church Cathedral, and me, a former assistant professor of mechanical engineering at Ohio University, supporting CPBN operations, research, and data analysis. The Network works alongside Vice Mayor Kearney, several other pastors and CVI workers, and is building relationships with critically important mental health service providers like the Seven Hills Neighborhood Houses' Trauma Recovery Center (TRC).

With the funding in this amendment, the Network will be better able to grow and build the needed city-wide coordinated CVI alliance - to share best practices, coordinate efforts and resources, and offer

⁴ <https://everytownresearch.org/report/city-data/#compare-gun-homicide-across-cities>

⁵ This cost of gun violence estimate is based on scaling by the relative cost of living in Cincinnati OH as compared to Louisville KY and Indianapolis IN, using numbers from the National Cost of Gun Violence to Taxpayers for Louisville (<https://costofviolence.org/louisville-ky/>) and Indianapolis (<https://costofviolence.org/reports/indianapolis/>).

⁶ "Implementing Outreach-Based Community Violence Intervention Programs" by Buggs, S., et al., September 2022. <https://www.lisc.org/our-resources/resource/implementing-outreach-based-community-violence-intervention-programs/>

expert-level CVI trainings. Increasing the number of people knowledgeable and caring, equipped as first responders and follow up responders will give devastated communities hope and needed support, love, advocacy, and some increased resources.

With the funds we will also be able to identify and hire a handful of expert level CVI workers who will be implementing the national program: Advance Peace (AP) with Peacemaker Fellowships. Both approaches: street outreach and AP are well described in [7]. Studies have shown that a tiny fraction of individuals in a community is actually responsible for committing the violence [8]. AP leverages this knowledge with a sharp focus on those most active and closest to the violence.

These Neighborhood Change Agents, using mentoring, life coaching, and a cognitive behavioral therapeutic and trauma-informed approach will build relationships and trust over months with those most impacted and most active and influential. Eventually, many of those most impacted will join the Fellowship and begin understanding the steps they need to take to leave their criminal pasts behind. Through 24-7 daily/nightly outreach, shared wisdom, compassion, healing, cognitive behavioral therapy, love, trust, and hope that will make it possible for those closest to make healthier choices for themselves, and their families. Over time, the resulting life transformations with the completion of the first cohort of Fellows have been shown to reduce shootings by 20%, and result in reductions of firearm-related homicides by 50% over five years [9]. Backing up the essential softer, human approach is rigorous data acquisition and tracking to ensure fidelity to the AP successful model.

As a visible, sustained presence in communities hardest hit by gun violence, both outreach workers and Neighborhood Change Agents provide visible, reliable, and accessible support that connects victims and community members to culturally appropriate, and effective social services. CPBN and they will also provide voices that advocate for and explain the specific needs of those experiencing gun violence in their communities, including the CVI workers.

Both Advance Peace and street outreach are important CVI strategies that have proven successful in many cities and states across the country – including Los Angeles, Chicago, Sacramento, Richmond, Oakland, New York City, and Detroit, to name a few. The Community Peace Builders’ Network has actively researched strategies and best practices that would support Cincinnati’s unique context and will effectively reduce gun violence. As guided by AP, the Network’s focus on key individual, social, cultural, behavioral, and environmental strategies will provide healing and opportunities using a public health approach that identifies and provides culturally responsive services. It will invest in and draw from the communities hardest impacted by gun violence. Strengthened community-centered collaboration and sustained support will be activated by CPBN through its diverse community, government, foundation,

⁷ https://nicjr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Effective-Community-Based-Violence-Reduction-Strategies_110222.pdf

⁸ Esbensen, F., & Huizinga, D. (1991). Victimization and delinquency. *Youth and Society*, 23(2), 202–228; Tolan, P. H., & Gorman-Smith, D. (1998). Development of serious, violent and chronic offenders. In R. Loeber & D. Farrington (Eds.), *Never too early, never too late: Serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders* (pp. 65–68). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications; Tracy, P. E., & Kempf-Leonard, K. (1996) *Continuity and discontinuity in criminal careers*. New York: Plenum Press.

⁹ https://www.advancepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/1-OnePager-Media_2.0.pdf

and law enforcement cooperation. CPBN has and will secure support from various stakeholders across the city, including City Council, law enforcement, community based organizations, foundations, and most importantly, residents and community members directly impacted by gun violence. This funding will allow us to build out the necessary organizational infrastructure to implement these strategies more effectively and across more neighborhoods, and most importantly, it will allow us the resources and capacity to strengthen community partnerships and create a strategic plan that will prepare us for long-term sustained gun violence reduction that will be a replicable statewide model.

But much of America's gun homicide problem happens in a relatively small number of predictable places, often driven by predictable groups of high-risk people, and its burden is anything but random... "We can't do much about crime prevention of homicide if we try to attack it as a broad, global problem, throwing money at it in a sort of broad, global way," said David Weisburd, a leading researcher on the geographic distribution of crime at George Mason University. [10]

Thank you again for your care and consideration of this important and cost-effective program to heal and save lives. We hope you will join us as part of the community that makes healing possible.

¹⁰ Aufrechtig A, et al. "Want to fix gun violence in America? Go local". The Guardian. (2017). <https://bit.ly/2i6kaKw>.

