

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

SUBMITTED BY:

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Community Peace Builders' Network



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 answer the clarion call for a community-led grassroots and grasstop movement, and break the cycle of hopelessness and brokenheartedness that's draining the life out of individuals, families, communities, our city, and county.

As community and faith leaders we join our legislators and decision makers in mapping out a possible plan that helps to advance the cause for saving lives. With your help, 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 are excited about 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.

For the past 15 years I have worked to reduce gun violence in Cincinnati, especially the urban core. I cannot speak to how others feel about gun violence, but I am burned out on trying to garner support for a cause that has taken control of our communities, cities, county, and country. The work of community violence intervention pulls on the individuals that commit themselves to walking the streets whenever and wherever needed. The realities of making a difference are sometimes met with resistance from people that sit in the seats of authoring. Hence, we are very appreciative for your willingness to provide financial assistance and moral support for groundwork that's creating a shift in how we fight this battle. Mitch Morris, Rodney Christian, Ti'Airea Powell, Dr. Carole Wormeldorf, and Jack Jose are confident that the CPBN along with Advanced Peace can create an overwhelming force of positive energy and nontraditional approaches to systematically move the needle in our favor. We have an opportunity to cultivate new relationships and capitalize on the rising number of community based organizations (CBOs) with skin in the game. We need your assistance and reliable resources to scale our outreach and inreach efforts to engage new voices, which will elevate the visibility, viability and volume of the true moral voice of a community that's willing to confront new and existing perpetrators, and promote peace as a lifestyle.

I have worked closely with families of many of those who have lost their lives to gun violence. I still hear the cries of mothers who show up on the scene only to see her child lying in under a sheet. We have

worked hard to deescalate crowds from rushing the police or waging war against the rival gang responsible for taking the life of their friend, family member or fellow gang member. The emotions are strong and the matters become vicious as they show up at the hospital and wait to get the news if their loved one has survived. We live this everyday. Now, the next generation of shooters are rising from the ashes of those communities that have been decimated by constant gun fire and gun battles. New shooters are mounting up to take over territories that once belonged to their older siblings, and even fathers. Your support will help us incorporate the Advanced peace fellowship program that will push back the urge of current and potential shooters to take another person's life. This thing is real.

My inspiration for helping youth involved with gun violence comes from my personal experience. As a youth growing up in Mississippi I was lightly involved in street life. I had access to drugs, alcohol and firearms. Unfortunately, I didn't have anyone to help guide me through the dark paths of violence. Today, I spend at least two to three hours a day mentoring young men that are being drawn into the traps of street life. Avondale, along with East Westwood, and Winton Terrace, currently have small-scale initiatives facilitating peace movements. Each of the neighborhoods has a small team of violence interrupters, outreach workers and peace advocates conducting boots on the ground programs to curb the gun violence. Support from funds allocated to CPBN and Advanced Peace will help scale our work to expand to OTR, West End, and Bond Hill/Roselawn neighborhoods. We have designed an infrastructure to assist other community based organizations (CMO) scale their initiatives to meet the rising demands for street advocates.

One of the young men in our group was shot earlier this year. He was 17 at the time. He was homeless, involved in street activities that were casting him in a den of thieves. As a result of multiple initiatives working together this young man celebrated his 18th birthday and he graduated from high school. He has an opportunity to become gainfully employed and possibly enroll in the First Gen College program at the University of Cincinnati.

My colleague, Dr. Carole Womeldorf, has provided a more in depth testimony of our priorities in Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

In closing, we asking this body to approve the amendments to 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.