

Testimony on HB33
Senate Health Committee

Date: May 8, 2023

Submitted by: Michelle Lee Heym

Chairman Huffman , Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio , and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony to support community gun violence funding in the budget. I am honored to provide testimony to support money to be allocated to Ohio communities suffering from the devastating results of gun violence.

My name is Michelle Lee Heym. I live in Powell, Ohio with my husband Russ, my 3 girls, one at Liberty high school two in college at Ohio State and George Washington University. As parents, Russ and I want to leave this world a better place for our children. We chose Ohio after living in Simsbury, Connecticut. We lived there during the Sandy Hook School shooting and my life will never be the same. I now live a short distance from Columbus and my Junior can't even walk home late from her night classes, without the fear of an extremist hanging out on the corner, brandishing an AR 15 and American flag. And every single day, I fear for the lives of my children. Just this past weekend, Columbus was again riddled with gun violence. I am calling on all lawmakers, to support money in the budget to fund Community Violence and Prevention in Ohio. interrupters.

The bottom line is Ohio's local communities are suffering every single day from the tragic effects of increased gun violence. Guns are the leading cause of death among children and teens in Ohio. In an average year, 65% of gun deaths in this age group are homicides. Community violence intervention and prevention programs can help reduce gun violence in Ohio's hardest hit communities. I'd like to share a personal story of my friend Katherine that hit's home how gun violence not only destroys families emotionally and maybe you'll truly understand why you must include money in the budget to support these families. Prioritizing community violence intervention programs in the state budget would help families like Katherine's.

I am honored to share Katherine's story, which was very hard for her to put together but I wanted you to hear exactly who these dollars would help.

On this day, national mother's bereavement day; I have survived 598 days since the murder of my youngest son, Bryce Persang. My son was the second murder on September 16, 2021. The deadliest day recorded in the city of Columbus. 5 shootings in 9 hours resulting in 4 homicides. I fear because there are no checks and balances since the passing of permitless carry law passed less than a year ago; we could very well see another day like that.

In those early days catatonic and consumed in grief, I believed life would give me a pass in anymore trials and tribulations. I learned quickly how naive I was. My struggle began less than two weeks later when my catalytic converter was stolen while my car sat because my starter went out. Luckily, I was extremely blessed in those first few weeks of the love and support I had been given. My car finally was repaired. It took me 6 weeks before I was able to return to work, at first I was only able to work a few shifts a week. During that time my son's case turned into a complicated case. I was having a hard time finding balance to move forward while also fighting for Bryce's justice. I had to find resources on my own, I was not given much direction or guidance in living my new reality. In 6 weeks my credit scored dropped 200 points for I wasn't able to pay my bills on time. More car repairs were needed for my car, I began to spiral in debt. I fell behind in my rent but was able to receive help through Impact but I was struggling to keep food on the table and to keep the utilities on. The help I eventually received took months and a lot of red tape to push through which only made my situation worse. I learned of the victims compensation fund in depth while attending my first homicide quarterly meeting with CPD and MOMCC in which I am a member of. In June of last year, I applied. In September I was denied for I was unable to prove the economical loss. A technicality, for none of the payments made to the funeral had my name on them. My daughter handled the funding for me because I was neither mentally nor emotionally able to handle any financial affairs at the time. My employer at the time stated my last shift worked was before my son was murdered and I was deemed unemployed during that time so loss wages I could not claim. Had I been able to receive that help then, I would not have lost my home of over 5 years which occurred in December of 2022 and would have not have lost my car last month which is getting ready to be auctioned.

I have tried desperately to find resources to help me but I haven't found resources specific to my situation, a co victim of gun violence. The only thing I receive is my trauma recovery therapy through the STAR program through OSU.

I haven't just lost my child but everything I worked hard for. I don't know what my future holds. Steps away from homelessness. My life is in complete limbo. My son's case is still an open homicide. The suspects fled the country within 48 hours of killing my son to a country where there is not an extradition treaty with our country. My family has been ripped apart and we now are turning against each other.

Tragically by speaking to other victims, I am not alone in the struggle to stability.

It's my belief the cycle of violence that plagues our city is a direct result of trauma not being addressed and the lack of resources available to crime victims. I urge anyone listening to my testimony to place yourself in my shoes for just 5 minutes. We need hope to keep going.

Katherine Persang, mother of a murdered child of Columbus.

Please Support HB33. Thank you for listening and considering my testimony and I'm happy to answer any questions.