

Testimony Against Cuts to Project Longevity in HB-6439 Budget Bill

February 20, 2021

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, ranking members Miner and France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Aileen Brill and I live in Westport. I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport (the "Council") and a member of the Council's Advocacy Committee.

The Council is a faith-based, non-sectarian social services agency dedicated to meeting the needs of people at risk and breaking the cycle of poverty and crisis in the Greater Bridgeport area. We have witnessed the devastation wrought by the ongoing threat of violence in Bridgeport. Getting guns off the street is a first step. To that end, the Council has partnered with the Bridgeport Police Department to launch its first ever rolling gun buyback. This gun buyback is funded by the Council, member congregations and private donors who share our passion to make Bridgeport a safe community where families can thrive.

Getting guns off the street is only one component of a comprehensive approach to reducing urban gun violence. Intervention programs are critical to diffusing a crisis and restoring a safe and healthy society. Programs like Project Longevity have been demonstrated to reduce group-involved gun violence. The 2015 [study](#) conducted by Yale concluded that in New Haven, Project Longevity was associated with a reduction of five group-member involved shootings and homicides each month. Project Longevity has proven to be so effective because it draws on the combined strength of community members working directly with law enforcement and social services providers to directly engage with violent street groups. These violent street groups terrorize the youth in Bridgeport and recruit them into a life of crime and violence.

For these reasons, I am testifying in opposition to the \$50,000 cut to Project Longevity as included in the Governor's proposed budget. I ask you to fully fund the program as it was passed in the FY 2020-2021 biennium budget.

We cannot break the cycle of poverty and achieve racial justice if children are not brought up in communities where they can thrive. Project Longevity is necessary but not sufficient. That is why I'm also asking you to also support the establishment of a state-level grant-making authority with dedicated funding along the lines proposed by CT Against Gun Violence. It would deliver reliable funding to other types of community-based gun violence prevention programs like StreetSafe in Bridgeport. According to the Giffords Law Center, gun violence is estimated to directly cost Connecticut taxpayers at least \$90 million annually. Failing to address the cause of this staggering expense is fiscally irresponsible. Investing more in community-based violence prevention programs would not only save lives and reduce the trauma inflicted on these communities, it would save taxpayer money.

I support more funding for gun violence prevention programs, and urge you to fully fund the Office of Policy and Management budget for Project Longevity. Last year gun homicides increased 50% in Connecticut compared to 2019. As the pandemic continues to wreak havoc on the economic stability of families throughout Connecticut, acts of desperation become inevitable. Programs like Project Longevity are more critical than ever. Now is not the time to cut funding to such a vital program. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Aileen Brill
Westport, CT

Cc: Senator Will Haskell, Representative Jonathan Steinberg