

To: Co-Chair Osten, Co-Chair Walker, and Members of the CT Appropriations Committee

From: Laura Kabel, Bridgeport, CT
Connecticut Chapter – Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America

Re: Proposed Cuts to Project Longevity Funding

Date: February 23, 2021

Dear Chairs and Distinguished Members of the CT Appropriations Committee,

My name is Laura Kabel. I was born and raised in Bridgeport where I currently live with my husband and four children. In my professional life, I am an educator and have spent twenty years serving children and families in cities across the country, including Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven. In my volunteer life, I am the local group leader for Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America in Bridgeport. Moms Demand Action is a non-partisan, grassroots movement of Americans who:

- demand common-sense, evidence-based solutions to the gun violence that endangers our children, families and communities,
- fight for laws and candidates who will reduce gun violence,
- support and partner with programs that reduce gun violence, and
- remember those who have died from gun violence and fight in their honor.

I am reaching out to you today as a Moms Demand volunteer, an educator, a parent, and a long time Bridgeport resident to urge you to support Project Longevity in this budget.

As I am sure you are aware, Project Longevity is a Connecticut-based organization that serves Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven, the three cities in our state that experience the most gun violence, both in terms of homicides and assaults. Project Longevity uses the Group Violence Intervention model to deter gun violence by partnering community members, law enforcement, and social service providers, who together directly engage with members of street groups. Through these connections and relationships, Project Longevity connects high-risk individuals with the support services they need to disengage from the cycle of violence.

The work of Project Longevity has been incredibly effective in terms of decreasing gun violence in our state. They started their work in New Haven in 2012 and then expanded to Hartford and Bridgeport in 2013. Their Group Violence Interruption work has been instrumental in bringing about a 42% reduction in Connecticut's gun homicide rate from 2012 to 2019.¹ In 2017, New Haven saw its lowest number of homicides in decades, representing a nearly 80% decrease since 2011.² This decrease was attributed in part to Project Longevity's work. Simply put—what they

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Underlying Cause of Death 2012-2019 on CDC WONDER Online Database, accessed Feb 13, 2020, <http://wonder.cdc.gov/ucd-icd10.html>.

² Esteban L. Hernandez, "New Haven Marks Lowest Homicide Numbers in Decades 2017," *New Haven Register*, December 30, 2017,

<https://www.nhregister.com/news/article/New-Haven-marks-lowest-homicide-number-in-decades-12464084.php>

are doing is working and the impact of their success is a significant number of lives saved, as well as a significant number of families not torn apart by gun violence.

Despite Project Longevity's proven track record of success in terms of reducing gun violence, funding for the program has been inconsistent, resulting in unpaid staff and employee departures. Over the past several years, Moms Demand Action and other gun violence prevention groups have been strongly and routinely advocating for full funding for Project Longevity. Any reduction to their budget, as shown by data, will result in an increase in gun violence and homicides in our cities. We are already dealing with an increase in gun violence as the far-reaching and devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are felt in our cities in terms of job loss, food scarcity, remote schooling, lack of after school programming, and overwhelming numbers of coronavirus cases. Our cities are experiencing such profound trauma on so many levels; we simply cannot afford to take away any funding that would help reduce the trauma of gun violence.

Pragmatically speaking, the costs associated with gun violence, including law enforcement, criminal justice, and health care, greatly outweigh the cost of investing in evidence-based preventative programs like Project Longevity. Gun violence costs Connecticut \$1.4 billion every year, of which \$60.4 million is paid by taxpayers.³ National estimates suggest that averting a single gun homicide saves taxpayers an average of \$688,600.⁴ This funding will be covered fourteen times over if one firearm homicide is prevented this year. The line item for Project Longevity is a tiny fraction of the vast state budget; the value of this small amount for this group doing such important work cannot be understated.

We know that the gun violence epidemic in this country has destroyed families and communities in every corner of our nation. We also know that gun homicide in our cities is more prevalent than anywhere else in our country and that Black and brown communities are hit the hardest. It is our collective responsibility to do whatever we can to prevent another family in our cities from being devastated by gun violence. Today, that responsibility takes the form of supporting Project Longevity in this budget, as they are a group that has fought relentlessly and effectively to end gun violence.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

³ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "EveryStat: Connecticut," <http://everystat.org#Connecticut>.

⁴ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Stand Your Ground Laws Are a License to Kill," January 25, 2021, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/stand-your-ground-laws-are-a-license-to-kill/>, citing Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "The Economic Cost of Gun Violence," February 17, 2021, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>.