



**Testimony of Amber Goodwin  
Executive Director, Community Justice Action Fund**

**Before the House of Representatives Judiciary Sub Committee on Crime,  
Terrorism, and Homeland Security**

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Thank you Chairwoman Bass, Ranking Member Ratcliffe, and members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Amber Goodwin, and I am the Founder and Director of the Community Justice Action Fund, a project of Tides Advocacy.

Gun violence impacts every American community. Although Black, Latinx and Indigenous communities bear the heaviest burden of this violence, we often receive the least attention from policymakers. Today, I speak not only as someone who has the privilege to be asked to testify before you, but also as a Black woman with the responsibility to speak for the millions of people of color who have been impacted by gun violence, and whose voices are absent from, or silenced within this movement.

I started working on gun violence almost five years ago as a staffer for one of my heroes, Congresswoman Gabby Giffords. In 2015, in the aftermath of the shooting in Charleston, I listened and learned from leaders like Pastor Mike McBride and Erica Ford, who have been working on violence intervention for decades. What I saw was a community torn apart because of systemic racism and access to firearms. When I looked around at other gun violence prevention organizations in the halls of Congress, I didn't see anyone who looked like me invited to the table to discuss and lead on issues on gun policy. I started an organization specifically to give voice to the communities most impacted by gun violence and center them in the debate on guns. But, I can assure you there is no debate here.

Every year, close to 40,000 people die by gun violence, but Black, Latinx and Indigenous people make up a disproportionate share of gun deaths due to homicide, interpersonal violence, and domestic violence. [1] According to a report we co-authored with the Live Free Campaign and Giffords in 2017, day-to-day interpersonal gun violence constitutes a disproportionate number of those shootings are concentrated in our cities – often in communities of color. Black men make up 6% of the US population, yet account for more than half of all gun homicide victims each year. Latinx men are also disproportionately impacted by gun violence. Of America's 13,000 gun-related homicide victims in 2015, over 8,500 were men of color. Additionally, this report suggests gun violence costs the United States at least \$229 billion every year – with a single gun homicide costing nearly half a million dollars in medical, criminal justice, and other expenses. [2] According to the Centers for Disease Control, Black and Latinx young men are disproportionately impacted by this tragic violence: almost 75% of America's 14,415 gun homicide victims in 2016 were either Black or Latinx, and nearly 85% were male. [3] The Violence Policy Center released a 2019 report that says Black women are murdered at a rate more than twice as high as white women. These rates are similar for Indigenous women. [4]

For the last several years members of the public health community have stated with confidence that gun violence is a health crisis in the United States. [1][2][3] This crisis has also been recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) and they

define violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.” [5]

Violence impacts millions of people living in the United States and touches every part of the healthcare system. Communities and neighborhoods are still working to address the generational trauma that comes out of one incident of violence. The national cost associated with violence amounts to hundreds of billions of dollars, annually. [3]

We know that universal background checks are one method for reducing gun violence, but we’d be remiss and irresponsible if we stopped there. It is my hope that policymakers and advocates use the voices, information, and legislation as a launching pad to pursue a comprehensive and holistic policy agenda that is responsive to, and driven by, communities directly impacted by violence. I believe and know that another world is possible, one where we are not just talking about which individuals have access to guns, but one where people don’t want to pick up guns in the first place. Many of the community intervention strategies you will hear about today are thanks to the work of our loved ones who have been on all sides of the gun and the work of leaders like Devone Boggan, Anthony Smith, Kayla Hicks, Javier Lopez, Dr. Shani Buggs, Chico Tillman, Alex Sanchez, Blinky Rodriguez, Michael DeLaRocha, David Muhammed, Jabari Holder, and Ben McBride. I mention all sides of the gun because I want to be clear that hurt people can hurt people, and we will work with and continue to be led by people who previously may have been involved in crime. Every positive data point you see here today is because of the people on the frontlines who risk their lives everyday for our communities and who have the lived experience of knowing this crisis. These are our loved ones and my heroes.

Gun violence impacts a wide range of social and economic areas, including education, racial inequity, economic development, and justice reform. [2] Violence, in all of its forms, touches countless Americans, with particularly devastating and disproportionate effects on communities of color, women, and the LGBTQ community. Now more than ever, municipalities across the country are investing in public safety and police violence prevention programs that aim to decrease incidents of gun violence. While there is progress, there is no one framework or approach that aims to unify the systems or sectors needed to end violence.

In states across the country, including California, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maryland, and most recently in New Jersey, state lawmakers are creating change through policy. What I am asking today is for the federal government to do the same.

In Massachusetts, the Commonwealth invests directly in local, data-driven gun violence reduction strategies primarily through two competitive grant programs: the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) and the Shannon Community Safety

Initiative (CSI). SSYI focuses its attention on young men ages 17-25, while the focus of Shannon CSI is preventing violence among youth ages 12-17. [6][7]

Earlier this summer, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law the California Violence Intervention and Prevention (CalVIP) grant program, which provides competitive matching grants for cities and community-based organizations to implement effective programs designed to interrupt entrenched cycles of shootings and retaliation. The legislature is also supporting AB 1603, which authorizes the CalVIP grant program by statute and strengthens the program by removing low caps on grant awards, requiring prioritization of grants from communities with the highest rate and number of shootings and homicides, and requiring prioritization of programs targeted at individuals at highest risk of being victims or perpetrators of violence. [8]

In 2019, the New Jersey legislature passed the Create and Fund the New Jersey Violence Intervention Program (NJVIP). This legislation will help with homicide reduction and interpersonal violence, and is modeled after effective state grant programs in Massachusetts and New York. The state will provide competitive multi-year grants to cities and non-profit organizations implementing effective, evidence-based violence intervention initiatives. In addition, the legislature created the Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Program Initiative to interrupt these cycles of violence by working with gunshot patients in and after their admission to the hospital, and requires the state's victim counseling service centers to create new partnerships with hospital trauma centers to connect gunshot patients with violence prevention programs. [9]

In 2018, the Maryland legislature established the Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program Fund (MDVIP) to invest and fund evidence-based public health approaches to gun violence prevention. MDVIP provides financial support to local governments & community-based organizations that use public health principles and demonstrate measurable positive outcomes in preventing gun violence, especially in regions that are disproportionately affected by violence. It also established a Council, anchored by the Director of the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Protection, to oversee the distribution of the funding and to review the efficacy of gun violence prevention programs. [10]

In addition to these state-based strategies, we must also support initiatives to combat gender-based violence - because far too often it is women who look like me whose stories go unheard. In a 2015 survey by the National Domestic Violence Hotline about survivor experiences with law enforcement, over half of the participants said calling the police would make their situation worse; one in four said they would never call the police again; and two-thirds said that they were afraid of not being believed and not getting the help they need as a result. One in four reported that they were arrested or threatened with arrest during a partner abuse incident. [11] Black, Latinx and Indigenous women are dying at alarming rates, and we need to be empowered to not only say their names, but also demand change, so their names aren't just another

hashtag. I could spend hours running down lists of our loved ones of color, including those most marginalized in this country such as our trans brothers and sisters of color, yet issues impacting communities of color and especially women of color aren't given the urgency, resources, or political weight to even come close to making a difference. The Reauthorization of VAWA H.R. 1585 would address the gaps in the law concerning firearms and domestic violence, and this is also homicide prevention.

I have the following requests of this body today:

1) Funding. That you allocate adequate funding for public health focused community interventions on gun violence; In order for gun violence, in all forms, to decrease or even disappear a public health framework needs to be adapted to reflect a unified, integrated violence prevention effort that encourages and supports extensive cross-sector collaboration with a focus on health. This new public health agenda would allow for more agencies to be involved and be held accountable for preventing gun violence and its health and behavioral health effects. In this model, health departments, hospitals, schools, universities, and non-profits would (1) share data on all forms of violence, (2) identify protocols for screenings and referrals, (3) develop and enhance programs and policies to prevent and reduce violence, and (4) use data to continuously increase the efficiency and effectiveness of these efforts. Additionally, that you create a gun violence task force led by members of congress and communities leaders that specifically look at amplifying gun violence as a public health issue in Black, Latinx and Indigenous communities

2) Supporting Women & Girls. Increase funding in the Violence Against Women Act, pass an enhanced reauthorization of the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act to ensure that programs are able to meet the needs of survivors, and create streamlines of funding for researchers of color to continue to innovate using proven strategies. We need large and long term investments in scholarship and research that is informed not only by evidence but also by the community.

3) Inclusion. That you commit to the full inclusion of individuals with lived experience on all sides of the gun crisis in all future decision-making by this body.

Shirley Chisolm said, "If there's not a seat at the table, bring a folding chair." We are still pulling up folding chairs to most tables in Washington. I am appreciative of being given a seat at the table here today, but as someone who has not personally been impacted by violence, I understand the importance of passing on the megaphone to those voices that have gone unheard in this debate for so long. I believe it's time we flip the table over and disrupt how we think about the possibilities of ending gun violence in America. I believe if we are serious about building safe and just communities, we can't just focus on the safety of some communities while turning our backs on those most affected. We need to focus on the safety of people who live in the neighborhoods that some politicians will only visit during the daytime.

I am entering into the record copies of research, reports, and policies led by people of color organizations on the front lines of this work to help support the asks we have today.

Chairwoman, Ranking Member, and members of the subcommittee, thank you again for inviting me to testify here on this critical topic, and I look forward to your questions.

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[1] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) Nonfatal Injury Reports.

[2] Giffords Law Center, Investing in Intervention: The Critical Role of State-Level Support in Breaking the Cycle of Urban Gun Violence (2016), <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Investing-in-Intervention-02.14.18.pdf>.

[3] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016, July 29). Cost of Injuries and Violence in the United States. [http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/overview/cost\\_of\\_injury.html](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/overview/cost_of_injury.html)

[4] Violence Policy Center, When Men Murder Women. (2019) <http://vpc.org/studies/wmmw2019.pdf>

[5] . Violence Prevention Alliance (2016). Definition and Typology of Violence. World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/violenceprevention/approach/definition/en/>

[6] "Section 40000005 - Safe and Successful Youth Initiative - Budget Summary FY 2019," Mass.gov, August 10, 2018, [http://budget.digital.mass.gov/bb/gaa/fy2019/app\\_19/act\\_19/h40000005.htm](http://budget.digital.mass.gov/bb/gaa/fy2019/app_19/act_19/h40000005.htm). "Safe and

[7] Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI)," Commonwealth Corporation, accessed September 23rd, 2019, <http://commcorp.org/programs/safe-and-successful-youth-initiative>. "Section 81000111 - Gang Prevention Grant Program- Budget Summary FY 2019," Mass.gov, August 10, 2018, Graziano, M., & Pulcini, J. (2013). Gun violence and the role of health care: A confusing state of affairs. *The American Journal of Nursing*, 113(9), 23-25. doi:10.1097/01.NA.J.0000434174.40289.af

[8] California State Statute. [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201920200AB1603](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB1603)

[9] New Jersey State Statute. *AN ACT concerning violence intervention in hospitals and 2 supplementing Title 26 of the Revised Statutes*. [https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2018/Bills/A5000/4806\\_I1.PDF](https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2018/Bills/A5000/4806_I1.PDF)

[10] Maryland State Statute. *House Bill 432 of Maryland's 2018 Legislative Session established the Violence Intervention and Prevention Program fund*. <https://goccp.maryland.gov/grants/programs/vipp/>

[11] National Domestic Violence Hotline <https://www.thehotline.org/resources/statistics/>

[12] [http://budget.digital.mass.gov/bb/gaa/fy2019/app\\_19/act\\_19/h81000111.htm](http://budget.digital.mass.gov/bb/gaa/fy2019/app_19/act_19/h81000111.htm)  
Carnell C. Dawn M.E. Paul D.S. Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs Work. *The Journal of Trauma Injury, Infection, and Critical Care*. Sept 2016

