



**Public Hearing Testimony of Breanna Brown
2022 CT Gun Violence Prevention Advisory Committee
(Youth Leadership Academy at Hartford Communities That Care, Inc.)**

A year later from my last testimony, we do not see a decrease in the problem but an increase in the risk of violence in teens that is linked to the accessibility of drugs and the normalization of doing drugs as a young adult.

In our day-to-day lives, we are in our environment, in schools, at home, or in our community, which promotes and influences the usage of drugs such as marijuana from generation to generation, normalizing the idea of it to minorities and then slipping us into the cycle. This normalization limits the proper perspective on drugs, which is, they are addictive and only a short-term solution that can cause worse effects in the longer run. We are suffering from not having a fixed mindset about how drugs could harm our health because we are surrounded and living by broken mindsets.

I see loved ones and friends slip into the cycle and start smoking weed at a young age as soon as they enter high school, to cope with stress and mental health issues just by getting high. They start and continue till they can't stop and can't go a day without it because their bodies simply won't function the same since they are now dependent on it. They seem to not be able to eat, sleep, or simply focus, and value the feeling of being numb and having an escape from reality more than the simple functions their bodies can do themselves.

Not only are drugs a short-term solution for a coping mechanism, but they also increase the risk of violent behaviors toward others because of the change in impulse control, not being in the right state of mind, and changing the outlook toward safety for one another.

Substance abuse is a common factor related to violence and gun violence in Hartford. State health officials have said that 134 occurrences from 2015-2020 were related to drug involvement and substance abuse. Finishing this year, we are at 36 homicides for 2022 and 130 shooting victims in Hartford, exceeding the total for last year (with three in the past two weeks alone).

In order to reduce the effects of this cycle, we can begin to take action by:

1. Promoting to teens the long-term advantages of mental health care (addressing the stigma).
2. Changing the mindset in a household of drugs by bringing awareness to the importance of not doing drugs even when exposed to them.
3. Conducting more drug interventions, because people are not being educated and have misconceptions about rehabilitation.
4. Making rehabs and therapy affordable.
5. Reinvest marijuana funds to support violence prevention programs.