

TO: Connecticut Department of Public Health Commission on Community Gun Violence
Intervention and Prevention

FROM: Aswad Thomas, MSW

DATE: October 25, 2023

Dear Connecticut Department of Public Health Commission on Community Gun Violence
Intervention and Prevention,

My name is Aswad Thomas, National Director of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice. I'm writing to you as a [victim of gun violence](#) and a national advocate on how to better support families and communities most impacted by gun violence. I'm also writing on behalf of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice, a national network of 180,000 victims of crime. I'm writing to urge the commission, state, and local government leaders to adopt policy recommendations to provide essential funding for services and resources to support the communities most affected by gun violence. Individuals, families, and neighborhoods across the state of Connecticut feel the devastating impact of gun violence. We must take significant steps to address this issue and aid those in need.

As community and gun violence continues to impact families, becoming the leading cause of death of our children,¹ crime survivors are calling for an end to the cycle of violence and for more help in the aftermath of trauma. Crime victims - including victims of gun violence and other types of community violence - urgently need both immediate and long-term resources to heal from the trauma they have experienced.

Most crime victims suffer long-term physical, emotional, and financial harm from their victimization and the ensuing instability and untreated trauma. However, a [national survey](#) of crime victims by the Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) shows most crime victims never received the help they need. Nearly 90 percent of victims did not receive economic assistance and three-quarters did not receive mental health support, according to the survey. The lack of investment in support for crime victims' trauma-related needs leaves communities trapped in cycles of crime and violence.

All victims deserve equitable and immediate access to victim services that allow them to heal and recover. The following seven-point plan presents priority policy solutions needed to advance healing, prevention, safety and trauma recovery for communities most harmed by gun violence. This agenda has been informed by crime survivors who are members of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice, a national network of 180,000 crime victims who join together to share stories, heal together and advocate for a justice system that prioritizes healing, prevention and recovery. [The seven policy recommendations include:](#)

1. Establish and Grow Trauma Recovery Centers
2. Increase Access to Public Safety Funding for Community Organizations on the Front Lines of Responding to Gun Violence

¹ New England Journal of Medicine (2022). <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/nejmc2201761>

3. Fund Community-Based Organizations Providing Peer-to-Peer Support to Victims
4. Expand Access to Victim Compensation and End Discriminatory Exclusions
5. Develop Flexible Victim Assistance Funds
6. Increase Legal Protections to Ensure Job and Housing Stability in the Aftermath of Violence
7. Document and Understand the Harm Caused by Gun Violence

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I look forward to seeing the community and state leaders proactively support the communities affected by gun violence.

If there are any opportunities for me to further discuss these policy recommendations, please inform me, as I am eager to contribute to this important conversation.

Sincerely,

Aswad Thomas, MSW