

Hartford Communities that Care Listening Session in Partnership with CT DPH

October 18, 2023

Mission: To bring members of the DPH Commission on Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention into Hartford to hear directly from the community about their experiences with services and supports and where they identify the gaps to be. The event also served to introduce the community to agencies and programs they may not have been familiar with.

The Listening Session hosted by Hartford Communities That Care (HCTC) on October 18th, 2023, aimed to facilitate dialogue and collaboration among agencies, community members, and key lawmakers in addressing community violence through gun violence intervention and prevention. Co Hosted by Hartford Communities that Care and Speaker of the House, Representative Matt Ritter, and joined by prominent lawmakers and community leaders including Representative Jillian Gilcrest, and Mrs. Deborah Davis of Mother's United Against

Violence, the event featured a panel that engaged in discussions to understand challenges, identify effective solutions, and strengthen partnerships in the Greater Hartford area. Adam Skowera, Legislative Liaison to the CT Department of Public Health, added his expertise to these critical conversations. This report outlines the significant accomplishments and progress made during this event.

DPH Partners, Programs, Stakeholders and Community Engagement Sub-Committee Members in Attendance:

- **Co-Chairs, Andrew Woods, CEO Hartford Communities that Care and Karl Jacobson, Chief New Haven Police Department**
- Department of Children and Families Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner
- Connecticut Children's, Hartford HealthCare, Trinity Saint Francis Hospitals
- Urban Community Alliance
- RYASAP/ Bridgeport StreetSafe
- Mother's United Against Violence
- Blue Hills Civic Association
- Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance
- Greater Hartford NAACP
- The Brother Carl Hardrick Institute
- ROCA Impact Institute
- Compass Youth Collaborative
- Department of Public Health

Accomplishments

1. Strengthening Partnerships

- a. The Listening Session provided a platform for agencies and community members to engage in meaningful discussions with lawmakers, resulting in strengthened partnerships.
- b. Representatives Matt Ritter and Jillian Gilcrest expressed their commitment to collaborating with local agencies in a more cohesive manner, understanding the significance of united efforts.

2. Community Engagement

- a. Through open discussions and community feedback, the event effectively determined community-level needs related to gun violence intervention and prevention.
- b. The testimony provided valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by communities affected by gun violence.

3. Program Identification and Expansion

- a. Attendees had the opportunity to discuss and identify programs that have proven effective in addressing gun violence. These discussions can lead to the expansion of successful initiatives.
- b. The agencies present, such as The Brother Carl Institute, NAACP, Blue Hills Civic Association, Compass Youth Collaborative, CT Council of Family Service Agencies, and Mothers United Against Violence, shared their missions and strategies, contributing to a broader understanding of the available resources and connected directly with the community.

Community Contributions and Concerns

1. Resource Allocation for Surviving Victims

- a. A key concern was raising awareness of after-care resources for surviving victims of gun violence. The discussion highlighted the need for accessible and timely support to assist victims on their path to recovery.

2. Expansive Definition of Violence Under VOCA

- a. The Listening Session emphasized the need to acknowledge that the definition of violence under the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) is more expansive than just domestic or partnership violence. This broader perspective can help address various forms of violence more effectively.

3. Efforts to Combat Drug Epidemics

- a. Community speakers raised the critical issue of drug epidemics, including cocaine, opioids, and fentanyl. Agencies and lawmakers discussed collaborative strategies to clean up these epidemics, recognizing the role they play in fueling community violence.

4. **Educational Funding and Support**

- a. Educational gaps in funding were acknowledged, highlighting the need for support for creative and productive programming and social-emotional support in schools.
- b. The panel recognized the importance of addressing these challenges and the necessity of providing quality education to the youth.

5. **Resource Accessibility**

- a. Representative Matt Ritter introduced the idea of creating a comprehensive resource document with links to services and organizations for victims and community members to access. This initiative aims to streamline the process of accessing support and resources.

Overarching Accomplishment: The Listening Session achieved its goal of connecting community members with previously unfamiliar social service agencies and programs. It empowered the community to directly educate lawmakers and stakeholders about perceived gaps in service provision. This synergistic approach not only introduced community members to essential support systems but also galvanized a collaborative, comprehensive strategy for addressing community violence through platforms like the DPH Commission on gun violence intervention and prevention and its member agencies. This event represented a significant stride toward a safer, more resilient Greater Hartford community.

In conclusion, the Hartford Communities That Care Listening Session on Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention achieved its mission by promoting collaboration, identifying community needs, and exploring innovative solutions. The commitment of all stakeholders to work collectively is a significant milestone in the ongoing efforts to reduce community violence and create a safer environment for the people of Greater Hartford.