

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 22, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
United States Senate Committee on
Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
United States Senate Committee
on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Chairman Shelby, and Vice Chairman Leahy:

As you work on the next legislative package to address the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and its devastating impacts, we strongly encourage you to include resources to address the specific and urgent needs of communities plagued by gun violence during this unprecedented time.

The devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including increased absences amongst youth due to school closures, unemployment, and housing and food insecurity, have exacerbated community gun violence, especially in communities of color. Since the stay-at-home orders have been in place, community gun violence has significantly increased in cities like Chicago, Portland, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and Louisville. In Chicago alone, gun violence has increased over 25 percent compared to last year and in Trenton, a curfew was implemented to address spikes in gun violence. In addition, the increase in gun sales over the last couple of months could continue to amplify risk factors for those vulnerable to suicide, domestic violence and community violence. With gun sales soaring and stay-at-home orders in place, individuals—especially youth—will be exposed to potentially higher rates of violence because in many communities impacted by gun violence, staying home is not safe and local recreation centers and other safe spaces are closed.

Making robust investments in violence intervention programs would be an important step in mitigating gun violence during the pandemic as gun sales continue to rise and emergency health services are strained. Violence intervention outreach programs decrease rates of firearm-related violence and homicides by addressing the underlying causes of violence, all of which have worsened since COVID-19 has swept through urban communities. With the closing of non-essential businesses and a decrease in transportation services, community-violence intervention programs are having an even more difficult time reducing violence. Many of these outreach programs rely on recreation centers and libraries as office space and public transportation to reach at-risk youth. Because of COVID-19, these community organizations have had to cut staff, programming and outreach efforts, drastically affecting their operations and ability to curb gun violence. Funding for these programs in the next package is also vital because these

outreach workers serve the dual purpose of acting as first responders and violence interrupters—mitigating violence and the spread of COVID-19, as they continue to educate their communities on handwashing, social distancing and mask-wearing.

Therefore, to strengthen our Nation’s public health infrastructure to combat gun violence and gun deaths as communities rally and respond to COVID-19, we respectfully request that any future legislation to address this pandemic include the following:

- **\$100 million in designated Byrne-Justice Assistance Grant Program (Byrne-JAG) Funds.** As the COVID-19 pandemic depletes local budgetary resources, emergency JAG funds are needed to sustain lifesaving community-based violence intervention programs in cities most impacted by gun-violence. These additional funds will enable cities to retain violence interrupters, who help keep the peace, and reduce the number of gun-related deaths and injuries that continue to burden the healthcare system during the pandemic.
- **\$150 million for a Community-Based Violence Intervention Fund.** The fund would allow local governments in the areas hardest hit by gun violence to develop and replicate effective models for lifesaving violence intervention initiatives. Funds should be awarded in a manner consistent with the purposes of implementing initiatives, through strategies such as hospital-based violence intervention, evidence-based street outreach and partnerships with critical stakeholders – such as health and education providers, law enforcement, local businesses and community leaders.

Ultimately, it is critical that community violence intervention programs receive the resources to sustain their services as our nation responds to this unprecedented public health crisis. With this assistance, we can assure that our communities emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic stronger than ever and no one is left behind.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tammy Duckworth

TAMMY DUCKWORTH
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker

CORY A. BOOKER
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin

RICHARD J. DURBIN
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey

EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono

MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

SHERROD BROWN
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

CHRIS VAN HOLLEN
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

KRISTEN GILLIBRAND
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders

BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris

KAMALA D. HARRIS
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez

ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar

AMY KLOBUCHAR
United States Senator

/s/ Thomas R. Carper

THOMAS R. CARPER
United States Senator

/s/ Brian Schatz

BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin

TAMMY BALDWIN
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher A. Coons

CHRISTOPHER A. COONS
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden

RON WYDEN
United States Senator