WELCOME,

to our first Policy Digest! Every month you will find the latest on what’s going on in the policy world, important bills to watch, and how to get involved to support policy to end gun violence in communities of color.

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GUN VIOLENCE AS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

One of the huge trends that have seen so far in 2021 is the growing recognition that violence is a public health problem that needs public health solutions. As you'll read in this digest, legislation in Texas and Illinois are part of this trend, and even the Federal Government is on board. The Biden-Harris Administration made a clear statement regarding the public health nature of gun violence, and Dr. Anthony Fauci, arguably the most recognizable public health figure in the United States today, embraced the notion that gun violence is a public health epidemic. The crime control approach to gun violence is still dominant, but with continued advocacy, more people can come to the understanding that there are better approaches that promote healthier outcomes for communities of color.

FUNDING FIGHTS

From California to Maryland to states in between, advocates have fought hard for investment in gun violence prevention and research, and they’re starting to win. Federal, state, and local public officials are slowly realizing that funding for intervention and prevention efforts is imperative. The tireless work of frontline workers, organizers, and advocates is finally paying off, however, it is only the beginning. Funding allocations are not yet meeting the full need of robust intervention and prevention efforts, nor are they anywhere near the actual cost that gun violence imposes on society as a whole, nor are the sources of funding permanent or sustainable. For all of the great work accomplished to this point, much more needs to be done.
Gender-Based Violence as a Path to Gun Violence

Every year, millions of women and girls endure gender-based violence in their daily lives. Gender-based violence is a public health crisis, and for many women, violence comes at the hands of people that they know. According to the Centers for Disease, 4.5 million living women in the United States have reported having been threatened with gun violence by an intimate partner. For many women, particularly transgender women of color, gun violence is often the final step in the cycle of abuse. According to the Victim Policy Center’s 2020 report, Black women were murdered at a rate nearly 3x higher than white women in 2018. For LGBTQ people, intimate partner violence is a particularly isolating and critical crisis. In 2020, nearly 40 transgender or gender non-conforming people - most of them women of color - were fatally shot or killed by other violent means.

For many women of color and LGBTQ people, public safety resources are rarely effective before the cycle of violence becomes deadly. According to a study conducted by the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1 in 4 women who reported an incident of domestic violence would not contact police again were another incident to take place. We know that we cannot end gun violence without fully committing to ending the public health crisis of gender-based violence that precedes so many of the homicides in our communities. To end that violence, we need to invest in community-led and survivor serving interpersonal violence programs that have historically been underfunded. Our leaders must invest in solutions that address the root causes of gender-based violence, and fund programs that empower and support survivors before gun violence occurs. In his preliminary budget, President Biden has requested an investment of $1 billion in funding for programs housed in the Department of Justice through the Violence Against Women Act. This includes funding for restorative justice programs, and programs to protect transgender survivors of violence. The request also provides funding to Health and Human Services to allocate for domestic violence hotlines as well as for cash assistance.
The issue of police violence against Black folks and other people of color continues to be a primary focus of our work, especially after this past month.

On March 29, an officer of the Chicago Police Department killed thirteen-year old Adam Toledo. On April 20, an officer of the Columbus Police Department killed sixteen-year old Ma’Khia Bryant, with the news of her death coming within an hour of a Minneapolis jury convicting former police officer Derek Chauvin of murdering George Floyd.

These recent events have added fuel to demands for legislation changing policing and the criminal legal system overall. Police reform laws named after Breonna Taylor and George Floyd have been introduced in state legislatures across the country, as well as in Congress. The Community Justice Action Fund continues to stand against police violence, and know that we cannot end gun violence without ending violence against people of color at the hands of the police.

POLICE VIOLENCE IS GUN VIOLENCE
It’s been a busy and exciting past few months in the gun violence prevention space on the federal level! Check this out:

**AMERICAN JOBS PLAN**
On March 31st, President Biden released his American Jobs Plan which included his commitment to $5 billion over eight years in support of evidence-based community violence prevention programs, which is an essential step in addressing the gun violence epidemic. To learn more about the Jobs Plan, check out the White House Fact Sheet here. This is a huge victory!

**EXECUTIVE ACTIONS**
On April 7th, President Biden announced a range of robust Executive Actions including more investments in community violence prevention. The President is directing five cabinet-level agencies to modify 26 existing grant programs to prioritize community-based violence prevention, providing access to over $10 billion in existing funding. This is a historic moment that comes after decades of advocacy and striving for recognition that gun violence is a public health crisis severely impacting communities of color. A big deal! Take a look at the White House Fact Sheet here. Curious about what an Executive Action is? Check out this explainer.
TAKING ACTION

These moves from the Biden-Harris Administration come from a result of direct advocacy with our partners in the FundPeace Campaign and our Federal Invest in Us Coalition.

So, what’s next? Now it’s time for action! We’re calling on Congress to protect the $5 billion funds and we need your help. Take action here.

There are also two House bills in Congress aimed at enhancing and strengthening background checks:

**H.R. 8:** The Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2021 was introduced by Gun Violence Task Force Chair Mike Thompson.

**H.R. 1446:** The Enhanced Background Checks Act of 2021 was introduced by Majority Whip James Clyburn, respectively.

SUPPORTING THE AAPI COMMUNITY

Hate crimes against Asians and Pacific Islanders communities have spiked since the beginning of the pandemic with Stop AAPI Hate reporting 3,795 incidents in 2020. President Biden announced a range of initiatives to respond to Anti-Asian Violence, Xenophobia, and Bias. This includes the allocation of $49.5 million from the American Rescue Plan to a new grant program for community-based, culturally specific services and programs for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. More information can be found here on Biden’s actions.

On March 16th, a series of mass shootings occurred at three Asian owned massage parlors in Atlanta, Georgia where eight people were killed. Among the eight victims, four were Asian women.

We will be supporting Asian-led organizations, and hope you will do the same:

- The Progressive Vietnamese Organization
- Red Canary Song
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice- Atlanta
- Center for Pan Asian Community Services

Exactly a month later on April 16th, a shooting occurred at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis where 90% of the workers are Sikh. Among the eight victims, four of them were members of the Sikh community. Here a few organizations to follow and uplift: Sikh Coalition, National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum - Indiana, and Asian Mental Health Collective. A link to donate to the Sikh FedEx Victims Memorial Fund can be found here.

Hate crimes against the Asian community are not new. We must support our friends and neighbors. The Community Justice Action Fund stands in solidarity with our Asian siblings and fellow leaders. Encourage someone affected by discrimination or harassment to report their experience here.
ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In his preliminary budget, President Biden has requested an investment of $1 billion in funding for Department of justice Violence Against Women Act programs, including funding for restorative justice programs, and programs to protect transgender survivors of violence. The request also provides funding at Health and Human Services for domestic violence hotlines and for cash assistance, medical support and services, and emergency shelters for survivors.

Our partners at the National Domestic Violence Hotline need your help to better understand the experiences that domestic violence survivors have with the police. If you identify as a survivor, consider sharing your experience anonymously. Fill out the survey here: bit.ly/AskSurvivors

ARE YOU A SURVIVOR OF RELATIONSHIP ABUSE?

The National Domestic Hotline is conducting a survey about survivor experiences with the police.

This survey will help inform best practices and policies to better support survivors.

Take the survey today at bit.ly/AskSurvivors

Completely anonymous and confidential.
TEXAS

CJAF worked in partnership with Rep. Rosenthal to file H.B. 1580 the Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Act, which would create a statewide Office of Violence Prevention and a grant program for violence intervention and prevention services - the first of its kind in the South. The bill has been referred to the Public Health Committee. Our Texas Invest In Us coalition is committed to creating a safer Texas, and now we’re pushing for a hearing on the bill. Join us here!

The Texas legislature is also considering a package of bills that would expand the ability for people to carry concealed firearms without a permit, despite the overwhelming majority of Texans that are opposed. According to a University of Texas, Tyler/Dallas Morning News Poll, more than 64% of voters are opposed to permitless carry, including 60% of Republicans and 56% of gun owners. The package of bills, including H.B. 1238, H.B. 1911, H.B. 1927, and H.B. 2900, appear to have the support of legislative leadership and may pass without organizing and advocacy to oppose the measures.

Legislation to Note:

**S.C.R. 8:** Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis in Texas

Sponsored by Texas Senator Cesar Blanco and Policymaker for Peace member. SCR 8 was referred to the State Affairs Committee on March 11th. This resolution is an exciting step in the right direction!

**S.B. 163:** Relating to requiring a national instant criminal background check in connection with certain firearm transfers; creating a criminal offense.

Sponsored by Texas Senator Cesar Blanco and Policymaker for Peace member. The legislation was referred to the Senate Committee on March 3rd.
WISCONSIN

We supported the Wisconsin Anti-Violence Effort (WAVE) to call on Governor Tony Evers to include funding for community-level gun violence prevention programs in his 2021-2023 budget…and it happened! Governor Evers included $2 million in the budget for the creation of a violence interruption grant program, as well as $4 million in funding for services for survivors of gun violence. Throughout the month of April, there were four hearings on the budget. You can view the full budget [here](#).

Now, the Wisconsin Invest In Us coalition is asking Governor Evers to invest 1% of the funds from the incoming American Jobs Plan into a Violence Prevention and Intervention Fund that would provide sustained funds for evidence-based community gun violence prevention models throughout the state.

MARYLAND

In 2020, the Maryland legislature proposed funding of $3.6 million designed to support the continuation and expansion of evidence-based public health strategies to curb gun violence. **S.B. 708**, passing both of the chambers in the legislature, it appeared the funding was on its way to on-the-ground organizations engaging in violence interruption work until Governor Hogan vetoed the bill. Earlier this year, the Maryland Violence Prevention coalition took up the fight to make sure both chambers overrode the veto and allocated the money to those on the front lines doing the work of violence interruption. **In late February of 2021, we successfully achieved our goal of overriding the veto and we are now working to ensure the funds reach the communities that need them the most!**

CALIFORNIA

In California, firearm enhancements are one of the most commonly used enhancements that add extra years to a sentence. The data [here](#) highlights that about 40,000 people in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation have a form of enhancements associated with their sentencing. These enhancements disproportionately affect Black, Brown, AAPI, and Indigenous people representing more than 89% of those tied to enhancements.

HERE’S A SOLUTION:

**A.B. 1509**, the Anti-Racism Sentencing Reform Act, would eliminate the use of most firearm enhancements and drastically reduce the enhancement in two Penal Code sections. The act would decrease the time added to 1, 2, or 3 years and provide a pathway for reassessment for those serving time due to enhancements.

Another bill we’re watching in California is **A.B. 1223**, which would place a 6% excise tax on the sale of firearms, ammunition, and ghost gun kits; and create the California Violence and Intervention Program (CalVIP) Firearm and Ammunition Tax Fund. A.B. 1223 was reported favorably by the Committee on Public Safety and Committee on Revenue and Taxation.

CalVIP is a coalition of organizations that are working to interrupt the cycle of violence in California. CalVIP provides grant programs to community-based intervention efforts and supports street outreach programs. The revenue imposed by the tax would be funneled into CalVIP to support on-the-ground initiatives and funding for organizations to end gun violence.
OTHER STATE BILLS TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON
CONNECTICUT

The Connecticut State Legislature is considering a bill that will allow violence prevention programs to access Medicaid funding. H.B. 5677 has strong support from the violence prevention community and is similar to what advocates have been pushing for on the federal level!

FLORIDA

Policymakers for Peace member and Florida Senator, Shevrin Jones, and Representative Omari Hardy filed S.B. 836 and H.B. 455, the companion bill, to address and combat gun violence in urban communities. S.B. 836 would create the Urban Core Crime and Violence Task Force.

ILLINOIS

H.B. 0192 creates the Firearm Violence and Reduction Study Act. This act requires the Department of Public Health to conduct a yearly statewide study on methods to prevent and reduce firearm violence and file a yearly report of the findings. Contingent on appropriation, the Department of Public Health will be provided $150,000 per year. This is a crucial step in addressing gun violence!

MINNESOTA

State Senator Chris Eaton introduced legislation establishing a pilot program to address trauma-related to gun violence. S.F. 2361 includes support for community-based violence prevention initiatives, including Project Life and the Minneapolis Group Violence Intervention. State Representatives Fue Lee and Liz Boldon are sponsoring companion legislation in the House, H.R. 1531. Both bills appropriate $100,000 for Fiscal Year 2022.
CITY AND STATE UPDATES
As many cities and states across the nation witness a spike in gun violence, communities have announced funding to community-based initiatives to combat the surge.

Through an executive order, Mayor LaToya Cantrell of New Orleans announced the launch of an Office of Gun Violence Prevention. The office will be funded initially with a two-year, $400,000 grant from the Kellogg Foundation. The city also plans to create a Gun Violence Policy Lab in partnership with Tulane University.

In Oregon, the Portland City Council unanimously passed a proposal to address gun violence with nearly $6 million in funding for community-based solutions. The Office of Violence Prevention is currently funded at $1.4 million and will receive an additional $4.1 million.

The Los Angeles City Council developed a plan of $88 million to invest in communities of color. This includes money allocated to homeless prevention/services, eviction defense services, and more. The Los Angeles City Council also voted to provide $2.15 million to hire and train community violence interrupters to end gun violence!

The City of Philadelphia released Roadmap To Safer Communities, which is a 5-year gun violence reduction plan. Investments include a total of $18.7 million of additional funding in FY22 on anti-violence efforts for a total of $35.5 million of investment. Over the life of the FY22-FY26 Five Year plan this is an additional investment of $70 million.

The Mayor of Knoxville in Tennessee allocated $1 million to address gun violence across the city. From the $1 million, the Knoxville City Council unanimously approved a $75,000 contract with Cities United to develop a plan to interrupt the cycle of youth violence in the area. Congratulations to our partners at Cities United on this achievement!

The City of Austin continues to lead the way in Texas with investments in local funds for violence interruption. On May 6th, the city will vote to accelerate more life-saving solutions. Follow Councilman Casar, one of our Policymaker for Peace members on twitter for updates: @gregcasar
CLOSING

THANKS FOR READING OUR FIRST POLICY DIGEST.
It's been a busy year so far and we’re just getting started. As our nation continues to battle the gun violence epidemic, we’re ready to respond and fight for safer communities all around.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, YOU CAN FIND US HERE:  [WWW.CJACTIONFUND.ORG](http://WWW.CJACTIONFUND.ORG)
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