

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Hon. Andrea Stewart-Cousins
New York State Senate Majority Leader
188 State Street
Legislative Office Building, Room 907
Albany, NY 12247

Hon. Carl Heastie
New York State Assembly Speaker
LOB 932
Albany, NY 12248

Re: Urgent and Necessary Increases in New York State Investments in Proven Non-Police Responses to Gun Violence

Dear Governor Hochul, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie:

In recognition of the seriousness of the gun violence crisis and to provide a direct and immediate response to incidents of gun violence in our communities, we call on the State of New York to immediately invest \$1 billion in evidence-based solutions, including community violence intervention and services for victims and survivors.

Gun violence is rising across the country—in big cities and rural communities, in red states and blue ones, including in New York^{1,2}. Especially hard hit are Black communities and other communities of color that have experienced decades of government divestment. Our overreliance on police and the tools of arrest, prosecution, and incarceration has harmed communities—and hasn't made us safer^{3,4}.

Unfortunately some have sought to exploit this crisis to further a mass incarceration agenda, rather than to advance meaningful, evidence-based solutions⁵ to improve community safety. More people in jail, rollbacks to bail reform and the adoption of racist and inaccurate predictive “dangerousness standards” or so-called risk assessment tools cannot be our response. That would be both morally wrong and ineffective⁶.

¹ <https://everytownresearch.org/report/gun-violence-and-covid-19-in-2020-a-year-of-colliding-crises/>

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/03/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>

³ <https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/inline-downloads/community-violence-intervention-programs-explained-report.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.vera.org/publications/for-the-record-prison-paradox-incarceration-not-safer>

⁵ <https://www.timesunion.com/state/article/GOP-leaders-lay-out-details-on-public-safety-16823482.php>

⁶ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3683790

Instead we should be dedicating resources to proven solutions at an unprecedented level as well as identifying where additional acute needs exist and developing a plan to fill those needs, including through new programming where required. Community-based, non-police responses to gun violence are one critical and proven component to reducing violence, but historically have not been funded at levels sufficient to meet the task at hand^{7,8}.

Community violence intervention (CVI) is a term that describes an array of programs and strategies working to reduce homicides and shootings through community-led interventions, including the employment of “violence interrupters” or “neighborhood change agents” who are skilled in intervention and who reach out to those at the center of gun violence, build relationships, and work to support healing and to address conflict through nonviolent means, including de-escalation and mediation. In their best form, these programs also provide supportive services, such as legal, housing and employment assistance and operate outside of coordination with the police⁹. There are many examples of effective community based organizations responding to gun violence throughout New York State.

Evidence-based support services for victims and survivors (including but not limited to emergency safety planning; services addressing basic needs such as housing, childcare, food and clothing; trauma and grief counseling; and restorative justice programming) are also an important element in responding to and preventing violence, and helping people heal when it does occur. Research shows that people who are harmed by violence may be more likely to engage in violence than others. Programming that recognizes the complex nature of violence, and that uses proven, person-centered approaches to treat the harm and trauma caused by violence can therefore help reduce the likelihood of future violence.

But, according to the National Crime Victimization Survey, only 8% of people who experienced violent victimization in 2019 reported receiving formal victim services. Limited research suggests a number of explanations including: lack of awareness that services exist; onerous law enforcement reporting requirements; services not being geographically or linguistically accessible; lack of culturally competent services; and survivors not believing that services are targeted to them or that they are unwelcome to access such services because they themselves have caused harm¹⁰.

⁷ <https://theappeal.org/the-point/local-officials-need-to-invest-in-violence-interruption-programs/>

⁸ In addition to immediate responses to incidents of gun violence, which we address in this letter, other types of programming, such as alternatives to incarceration and long-term holistic community-based services also play a role in violence prevention and should not be ignored. We understand that there are additional budget asks pending related to these programs and this letter should be interpreted as additional to those requests, not as replacing them.

⁹ There are many forms of violence that communities experience that CVIs don't focus on—including gender-based violence, sexual violence, child abuse, interpersonal violence and domestic violence, violence that emerges from hate and bigotry, police violence, and other forms of structural violence. While it is critical to shed light on effective solutions to gun violence, we must also acknowledge who and what is left out, all of which also deserve investment and recognition.

¹⁰ No one should be excluded from receiving services because of a criminal record or because they have caused harm.

Many survivors are also unwilling to access services because they believe they will be required to cooperate with law enforcement. This is especially true within certain marginalized communities - including BIPOC, LGBTQ, immigrant, and domestic violence survivors - that have had negative experiences with law enforcement or may be concerned about the consequences of cooperating on themselves or their loved ones. This reality demands the inclusion of funding for new programming that operates outside of entanglements with law enforcement.

Historically in New York State, public safety budgets¹¹ have been dominated by funding for police, courts, jails and prisons with a tiny fraction dedicated to community-based programming despite their proven success and future promise. As we seek solutions to respond immediately to incidents of gun violence we must not go backwards towards further investments in policing and incarceration, but instead must move forward towards short-, medium- and long-term community-based investments, particularly in those communities that have long been starved of resources.

Today the undersigned groups make the following recommendations for the 2022-2023 budget:

- 1) \$500 million explicitly directed to non-police, non-prosecutor community-based gun violence intervention programs statewide that are permitted to work independently of law enforcement. This funding should go toward existing, successful programs and also to support the development of new programming in geographic areas where none currently exists.
- 2) \$500 million to support survivor programming that is community-based, readily available, and responsive to the needs of survivors. This funding should include support to successful current programs and must include the development of new programs that are permitted to work independently of the criminal legal system, particularly those targeting communities and geographic areas where no services currently exist¹².
- 3) The establishment of a process led by directly impacted people to develop and fund a comprehensive plan to disrupt and eliminate cycles of violence focused on community-based, non-carceral investments that includes both identifying and funding immediate interventions through successful existing programs and developing new programming¹³.

Sincerely,

¹¹ <https://www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/archive/fy22/ex/book/publicsafety.pdf>

¹² New York's use of regressive surcharges and fines to fund a variety of services further compounds the harm of the criminal legal system. It is imperative that any new services are not reliant on funding generated from surcharges and fines from the same communities that are targeted by over-policing and mass incarceration.

¹³ The two, specific, budget asks above represent just one portion of this response, but should be funded as immediate interventions.

A Little Piece Of Light	National
Act for Abolition	Brooklyn
Ahhiminc - All Hearts Heal Imprisoned Minds Incorporated	National
Alternatives to Violence Project	National
American Friends Service Committee	Statewide
Antiracist Alliance	Westchester
Apogee Center of MHACG, Inc.	Columbia County & Greene County
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action Long Island	Nassau
BRAG	Bronx
BronxConnect (Urban Youth Alliance)	Bronx/Manhattan
Brooklyn Community Foundation	Kings County
Call To Action Metro NY	New York City
Capital Area Against Mass Incarceration (CAAMI)	Albany
Capital Region, New York Civil Liberties Union	Albany, Rensselaer, Schenectady, Saratoga, Washington, Warren, Columbia and Greene counties
Center for Appellate Litigation	Statewide
Center for Community Alternatives	Statewide
Center for Law and Justice	Albany
Chemung County Public Advocate's Office	Chemung County
Children's Defense Fund-NY	Statewide
Children's Rights	New York City
Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)	New York City
Church of the Ascension	New York City
Church Women United in New York State	National

Citizen Action of New York - Western New York Chapter	Erie
Close Rosie's	New York City
Close Rosie's	New York City
Common Justice	Brooklyn
Community Service Society of New York	New York
Congregation B'nai Yisrael	Westchester County
Congregation Beit Simchat Torah	New York City
Correctional Association Of New York	Statewide
EndQINY	Statewide
Envision Freedom Fund	New York City
Exodus Transitional Community	Hudson Valley/New York City
Faith in New York	New York City
Families Together in New York State	Statewide
finequity.org	Brooklyn
First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn	Brooklyn
Forum for Youth Invesetment	New York City
Free the People WNY	Erie
Freedom Agenda, Urban Justice Center	New York City
Gangstas Making Astronomical Community Changes Inc (G-MACC)	Brooklyn
Genesee Valley, New York Civil Liberties Union	Western New York
Girls for Gender Equity	Brooklyn
GLSEN Lower Hudson Valley	Hudson Valley
Good Shepherd Services	New York City
HALTsolitary Campaign	Statewide

Health and Incarceration Connection (URMC)	Monroe
HK Dems	New York
Housing Works	Kings County, NYC
Hudson Valley, NYCLU	Orange, Ulster, Westchester, Dutchess, Rockland, Sullivan, Putnam
Indian Point Safe Energy Coalition	New York
Innocence Project	National
It Could Happen To You	Statewide
It's a Process.org	National
Ithaca Prisoner Justice Network	Tompkins County
Jews for Racial & Economic Justice (JFREJ)	New York City
Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club	New York City
Justice and Unity for the Southern Tier	Broome
Justice For Families	National
Justice Strategies	National
Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice	Statewide
LISJAN	Long Island
Man Up Inc USA	Brooklyn
Mental Health Association in Orange County, Inc.	Hudson Valley
Mental Health Association of Columbia-Greene Counties, Inc.	Hudson Valley
Muslim Peace Fellowship	National
muvsu - what moves you?	Bronx
NAACP Mid-Manhattan Branch	New York City
National Action Network-Second Chance Committee	National

NAMI NYS Criminal Justice	Statewide
Nassau County, New York Civil Liberties Union	Nassau
Neighborhood Defender Service	Manhattan
New Hour for Women & Children-Long Island	Suffolk & Nassau
NYC Anti-Violence Project	New York City
New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU)	Statewide
New York Civil Liberties Union, Hudson Valley Regional Office	Hudson Valley
New York Communities for Change	New York City
New York County Defender Services	New York City
New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault	Statewide
New York State Defenders Association, Inc.	Statewide
New York State Jails Justice Network	Statewide
New York Transgender Advocacy Group	National
New York Working Families Party	Statewide
Newburgh LGBTQAI+ Center	Hudson Valley
North Bronx Racial Justice	Bronx
North Star Fund	Hudson Valley and New York City
Now we Rise !	New York City
NYC Presbytery Justice Ministries Committee	New York City
NYC Jails Action Coalition	New York City
NYPAN Greene	Greene
NYS Prisoner Justice Network	Statewide

Osborne Association	Statewide
Partnership for the Public Good	Erie
Pax Christi Western NY	Erie
Peace Action of Staten Island	Richmond
PEER/NYPAN - SUFFOLK	Suffolk
Policing and Social Justice Project	Brooklyn
Prison Families Anonymous	Suffolk
Progressive Doctors	National
Public Issues Committee, LI Council of Churches	Nassau and Suffolk
Racial Justice Team, Fourth Universalist Society in the City of New York	New York City
Release Aging People in Prison Campaign	Statewide
Restorative Action Alliance	Statewide
Rise & Resist-NY	New York City
Rockland Immigration Coalition	Rockland
Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) NYC	New York City
Silicon Valley De-Bug	National
Sisters of Justice	Statewide
SparkAction	New York City
SSJ Sister Karen Klimczak Center for Nonviolence	Erie
Suffolk County, New York Civil Liberties Union	Suffolk
The Gathering for Justice	National
The Legal Aid Society	New York City
Together We Will Long Island	Nassau and Suffolk

Treatment Action Group	Nationwide
Trellis	Brooklyn
Troy 4 Black Lives	Rensselaer
True 2 Life	New York City
Unchained	Onondaga
United Voices of Cortland	Cortland
VOCAL-NY	Statewide
Walkabout Clearwater	Westchester
Wayne County Public Defender	Wayne
WESPAC Foundation, Inc.	Westchester
West Harlem Progressive Democratic club	Manhattan
Westchester for Change	Westchester
Witness to Mass Incarceration Inc	New York City
Women & Justice Project	Statewide
Youth Over Guns	National
Youth Represent	New York City