May \_\_\_, 2022

Hon. Bryan Cutler

139 Main Capitol Building

P.O. Box 202100

Harrisburg, PA 17120

Hon. Kerry A. Benninghoff

110 Main Capitol Building

P.O. Box 202171

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Hon. Stan Saylor

245 Main Capitol Building

P.O. Box 202094

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Hon. Matthew D. Bradford

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Office of the Governor

508 Main Capitol

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**RE: Supporting $80 Million Appropriation for PCCD School Safety & Security Grant Program**

Dear Speaker Cutler, Majority Leader Benninghoff, Chairman Saylor, Democratic Chair Bradford & Gov. Wolf,

I am writing to express my support for an $80 million appropriation in the FY 22-23 budget for the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency’s (PCCD) School Safety and Security Grant Program. This grant program creates safer and more secure communities by providing resources to schools, municipalities and community-based organizations for a wide variety of evidence-based approaches to reduce community violence.

Public safety is a top concern for me and my constituents as violence surges across Pennsylvania. In 2020, 788 Pensylvanians died by firearm homicide, a 43% increase from 2019 and the highest number in recorded history.[[1]](#footnote-0) While state totals from 2021 are forthcoming, data from cities such as York, Reading, Allentown, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and Erie suggest violence remains at historically high levels. This violence costs Pennsylvania $12 billion per year in expenses such as medical costs, lost earnings and productivity, and property damage – including $567 million paid directly by taxpayers for expenses such as public safety, EMS, and criminal justice responses.[[2]](#footnote-1)

PCCD’s School Safety and Security Grant Program saw $150 million worth of applications last year, leaving it able to only fund a small portion of those programs and meet only a fraction of the need.

The initiatives supported by this grant program are shown to be effective at reducing violence. Research consistently demonstrates that community-based programs targeted towards individuals at high risk of being involved or impacted by violence can prevent the initial violence and stop its spread. The programs range in approach, including:

* Community-based programs that use credible messengers to identify potential violence and intervene before it occurs through targeted engagement. These programs have reduced violence by up to 73% in targeted areas of Atlanta and Milwaukee.[[3]](#footnote-2)
* Workforce development that is paired with support systems to provide alternative methods of conflict resolution such as READI (Rapid Employment and Development Initiative). A recent study by The University of Chicago Crime Lab found that READI participants saw 63% fewer arrests and were 19% less likely to be shot or killed compared to a similar group of men that were not in the program.[[4]](#footnote-3) Targeted workforce efforts in Reading, Allegheny County and Temple have received state funding.
* Group Violence Intervention programs that partner law enforcement with community organizations to use a “carrot and stick” approach to engage individuals at high risk for being involved in shootings. In the City of Chester, this strategy has reduced gun homicides by up to 44%.[[5]](#footnote-4) Such efforts in York, Reading, Bucks County, and Harrisburg received funding last year.
* Hospital-based, trauma-informed care that supports victims of violence as they recover by providing services to them and the community, halting the spread of violence. Lehigh Valley Hospital and Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia were funded last year by PCCD.

Examples of these initiatives in my district include...

The only thing missing for these programs to succeed is the necessary financial resources. Organizations need monetary support to be able to use their knowledge and experience to reduce violence in communities across the Commonwealth.

With growing violence making residents and visitors more concerned than ever for their safety, chilling economic activity and damaging the quality of life, especially for younger Pennsyvlanians, now is the perfect time for the Commonwealth to provide significant and sustained support for these evidence-based approaches to reduce violence.

I hope that we can work together to include this critical $80 million line item in the budget to make my district and the entire Commonwealth a safer and better place to live.

Thank You,

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. [Underlying Cause of Death 1999-2020](https://wonder.cdc.gov/wonder/help/ucd.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. [Understanding & Addressing Gun Violence in Pennsylvania](https://www.pccd.pa.gov/Pages/CJAB%20Conference%202021/final_2021%20CJAB%20Conf%20Gun%20Violence%20Presentation%204-20-21.pdf). 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Annie E. Casey Foundation. “[Improving Community Safety Through Public Health Strategies](https://www.aecf.org/resources/improving-community-safety-through-public-health-strategies#findings-and-stats).” July 20, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Chicago Sun-Times.“[Arrests, shootings plunged among those who took part in anti-violence program, even as crime spiked in city, new study finds](https://chicago.suntimes.com/crime/2022/4/21/23004981/readi-chicago-anti-violence-gun-university-uchicago).” April 21, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. WHYY. “[Assessing the ways Chester’s Partnership for Safe Neighborhoods program has succeeded](https://whyy.org/articles/assessing-the-ways-chesters-partnership-for-safe-neighborhoods-program-has-succeeded/).” January 12, 2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)