



Friends Committee
on National Legislation

Lobbying with Quakers

Rooted in Restorative Justice, **Violence Interrupters Increase the Peace**

AN FCNL ANALYSIS OF POLICY, PRACTICE, AND LITERATURE

May 2024

Rooted in Restorative Justice, Violence Interrupters Increase the Peace

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Introduction

Conflict is a normal part of life. However, in a country where guns outnumber people, altercations can become deadly. Disagreements disproportionately turn violent in marginalized communities plagued with disinvestment, oppression, and a history of trauma. We must look to intervention models that work to prevent neighborhood gun violence.¹

An emerging approach to gun violence

There is a newer approach offering alternatives to gun-related death and injury from within the community itself. These community-led programs view violence as a learned behavioral adaptation, and therefore, changeable.

Individuals, called violence interrupters, step in before conflict escalates to a fatal level. These “trustworthy messengers” (individuals deemed credible by the community) are from the communities they serve and share similar life experiences with their neighbors. Trained in conflict resolution, their unique perspectives enable them to intervene when they sense a disagreement escalating², which can, in turn, reduce the need for police intervention.

Scaling up violence interrupter programs with robust federal funding will save more lives by stopping gun violence before it happens.

Scope of paper

In this paper, we explore the historical roots of community-level gun violence in the United States and its disproportionate impact on Black and Brown communities. We outline the role and effectiveness of violence interruption programs as deterrents to gun violence.

Finally, we address program challenges and lay out policy recommendations vital to the wellbeing and dignity of the individuals and communities confronted by frequent gun violence.

1. Smith, S., Ferguson, C.J., & Henderson, H. (2021). *“An Exploratory Study of Environmental Stress in Four High Violent Crime Cities: What Sets Them Apart?”* Crime & Delinquency.

2. The VI work at FCNL is a new program that involves interviewing academics, practitioners, and violence interrupters. This claim was derived from those conversations.

Violence interruption and Quaker principles

Mediating conflict before it escalates goes to the heart of the Quaker Peace Testimony³ and the belief in Inner Light—the conviction that God is in every person. In other words, we all have value, potential, and purpose.

The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) believes that every person’s potential deserves fulfillment. There is inherent worth, free of caveats and regardless of life paths. We see the inherent worth in the victim of violence as we do in those committing or potentially committing violence. We strive for a world where no one feels violence is a viable solution.

Our analysis of violence interrupter programs compels us to advocate for increased funding to support these life-saving initiatives. Individuals and communities with a history of marginalization deserve resources, policies, and programs that embody Inner Light and dignity—a value that violence interrupters recognize.

Gun Violence in the United States

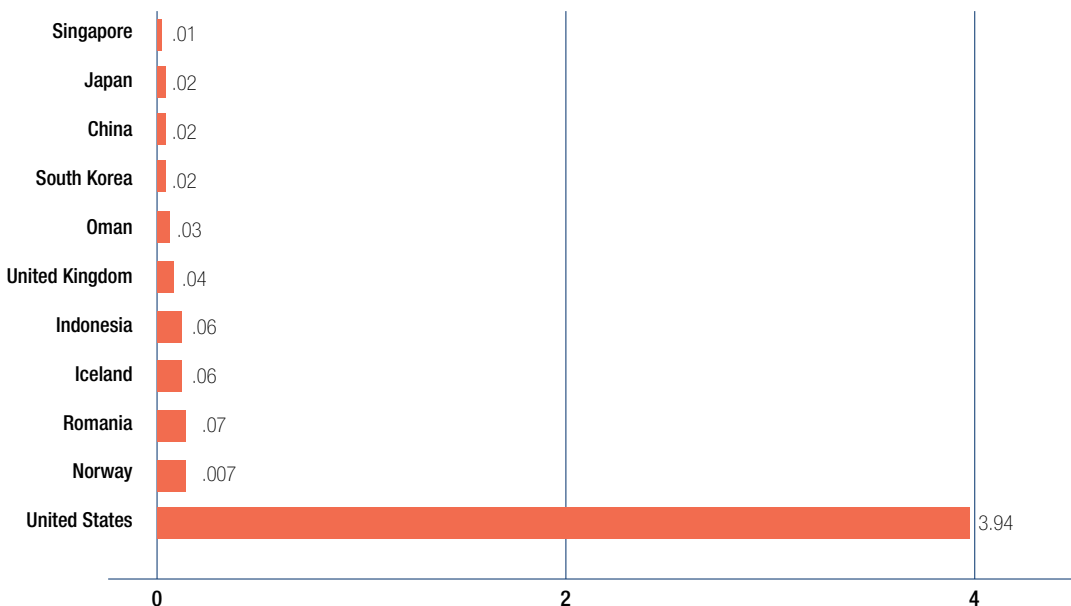
An American challenge

Gun violence is a uniquely American problem. The United States has a higher death rate from firearms than any other high-income nation⁴.

How the U.S. Compares with the Lowest Rates of Violent Gun Deaths Worldwide

Violent gun deaths per 100,000 people (2019). Excluding armed conflict and accidents or self-harm.

Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluations. Credit: Connie Hanzhang Jin/NPR



“For a lot of folks, the conversation starts with the gun, or the use of that gun. But we don’t talk about how we got to that point.”

Marcus Ellis, Executive Director, Peace for DC, and Board Member, Cities United

3. ‘*The Quaker Peace Testimony* (1660).’

4. Evan D. Gumas, Munira Z. Gunja, Reginald D. Williams II, “*The Health Costs of Gun Violence: How the U.S. Compares to Other Countries*,” Commonwealth Fund, April 2023.

According to the American Public Health Association, “Gun violence is a leading cause of premature death in the United States. Guns kill more than 38,000 people and cause nearly 85,000 injuries each year.”⁵

There are 120 guns per 100 people in the United States⁶. Additionally, gun-related injuries are a leading cause of death in children⁷.

In 2023, the Gun Violence Archive documented 18,854 deaths from gun violence, 36,338 injuries from guns, and 656 mass shootings (those involving four or more people)⁸.

Misleading public perceptions

While high-profile mass shootings capture media attention, most gun-related injuries occur in under-resourced or marginalized urban communities⁹. These incidents often receive less media coverage, distorting the public perception of gun violence¹⁰.

The disproportionate impact on marginalized communities

Poorer Black and Brown communities are hit hardest by gun violence^{11 12}.

These communities face significant challenges, including underinvestment in education¹³ and housing¹⁴. Economic opportunities are limited, restricting income and wealth-building potential¹⁵.

Furthermore, these communities experience higher rates of homelessness and mass incarceration than predominately white neighborhoods¹⁶.

“Black people are at highest risk for gun homicide. A Black person is 12 times more likely to be a victim of gun homicide than is a white person.”¹¹

2022 Johns Hopkins University study

5. “*Gun Violence*,” American Public Health Association.

6. *Small Arms Survey*.

7. *Gun Violence Research Update*, July 2022, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

8. *Gun Violence Archive*.

9. *Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence*. (n.d.). Community Gun Violence.

10. Penn Medicine. “*Study: Media’s Reporting on Gun Violence Does Not Reflect Reality*.” October 2020.

11. The Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions. (2022, April 28). “*A Year in Review 2020: Gun Deaths in the U.S.*”

12. The Guardian. “*Special Report: Fixing Gun Violence in America*.” (2017).

13. Sylvia Allegretto, Emma García, and Elaine Weiss, “*Public education funding in the U.S. needs an overhaul: How a larger federal role would boost equity and shield children from disinvestment during downturns*,” Economic Policy Institute, July 12, 2022.

14. Bipartisan Policy Center, “*Understanding and Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities In Housing*,” December 2021.

15. NPR, “*Why The Racial Wealth Gap Is So Hard To Close*,” June 14, 2022.

16. Blankenship, K. M., Rosenberg, A., Schlesinger, P., Groves, A. K., & Keene, D. E. (2022). “*Structural Racism, the Social Determination of Health, and Health Inequities: The Intersecting Impacts of Housing and Mass Incarceration*.” American Journal of Public Health.

The intersection of racism, intergenerational trauma, and gun violence

Years of policy neglect and resource deprivation, rooted in systemic racism, amplify gun violence in the United States, perpetuating racial inequality and discrimination¹⁷. Many Black and Brown communities in urban areas are weathering the impacts of past and current trauma.

Historical trauma from centuries of racialized violence and discrimination burdens entire communities. Researcher and social worker Meghan Resler describes this trauma as the ‘cumulative emotional and psychological harm experienced by groups, which is then transmitted across generations within families and communities.’¹⁸

Intergenerational trauma²⁰, coupled with the collective grief it brings, remains persistent for communities, especially as descendants continue to face marginalization. Constant exposure to community violence worsens stress²¹. Despite the trauma not being self-inflicted, public policies often fall short of offering adequate support, with blame frequently misdirected at the victims rather than the root causes²².

Towards effective intervention

For intervention programs to be effective, they must be deeply rooted in understanding these realities. The most impactful investments in reducing community-level violence prioritize humanity, address the root causes, and aim to reduce further harm.

“Minority populations are disproportionately exposed to conditions such as concentrated poverty, racism, limited educational and occupational opportunities, and other aspects of social and economic disadvantage contributing to violence.”¹⁹

American Journal of Preventive Medicine

17. Poulson, M., Neufeld, M.Y., Dechert, T., Allee, L., & Kenzik, K.M. (2021). **“Historic redlining, structural racism, and firearm violence: A structural equation modeling approach.”** The Lancet.
18. Resler, M. (2019). **Systems of Trauma: Racial Trauma.** Family and Children’s Trust Fund of Virginia.
19. Sheats, K. J., Irving, S. M., Mercy, J. A., Simon, T. R., Crosby, A. E., Ford, D. C., Merrick, M. T., Annor, F. B., & Morgan, R. E. (2018). **Violence-Related Disparities Experienced by Black Youth and Young Adults: Opportunities for Prevention.** Am J Prev Med, 55(4), 462–469.
20. **“Understanding the Impact of Trauma,”** Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.
21. Akinyemi, A. A. (2022). **Historical trauma compounds experiences of racial injustice.** Nature Human Behaviour, 6, 1183.
22. Bowen, E. A., & Murshid, N. S. (2016). **Trauma-Informed Social Policy: A Conceptual Framework for Policy Analysis and Advocacy.** Am J Public Health, 106(2), 223–229.

Violence Interruption Programs

Chicago's pilot program: Cure Violence

To address the spread of gun violence in the late '90s, the city of Chicago piloted a community-led program to address conflict with promising results²³. Gun shootings in the West Garfield Park neighborhood were reduced by 67 percent in the first year of implementation²⁴.

With the support of leaders and community stakeholders, Chicago implemented Cure Violence²⁵ (formerly known as CeaseFire). The approach was conceived by Gary Slutkin, M.D., the former head of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Intervention Development Unit.

Violence as a "contagious disease"

Slutkin's approach to violence draws inspiration from public health models used for epidemics like HIV and tuberculosis. His theory suggests that violence "behaves like a contagious problem... transmitted through exposure, acquired through contagious brain mechanisms and social processes."²⁶

In his approach, violence can be effectively countered using health methods.

The model relies on three key tactics²⁷:

Interruption. Directly interrupting the transmission of violence.

Identification. Identifying those most likely to commit violence and then altering their mindset.

Modification. Changing group norms about violence through community mobilization.

"The interruption of violence occurs by preventing retaliatory shootings, mediating ongoing conflicts, and continuing to follow up to keep the conflicts 'cool.'"

Annual Review of
Public Health

23. Ritter, Nancy. (2009). *CeaseFire: A Public Health Approach to Reduce Shootings and Killings*. National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

24. American Psychological Association. (2011). *CeaseFire: A public health approach to reduce shootings and killings*. *Monitor on Psychology*, 42(6).

25. Cure Violence Global. (n.d.). *About*.

26. Cure Violence Global. (n.d.). *Our Vision*.

27. Cure Violence Global. (n.d.). *What We Do*.

The Annual Review of Public Health further describes how this works: “The interruption of violence occurs by preventing retaliatory shootings, mediating ongoing conflicts, and continuing to follow up to keep the conflicts ‘cool.’”²⁸

Pushback on the disease model

Public opinion and a sense of urgency regarding community-based gun violence are transformed when violence is approached with the same intense dedication that experts give to health epidemics. This change in public sentiment captures the attention of legislators. Many groups use the term “epidemic” for this purpose.

However, labeling gun violence as a contagious disease might inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes, suggesting that Black and Brown communities in urban settings are “infected” or “dirty.” Such framing can reinforce racial biases²⁹, implying that these communities are incapable of fostering safe, thriving environments.

FCNL believes in the capacity of all communities to establish safe, healthy, and prosperous realities. Gun violence is a form of war in communities that FCNL seeks to end aligned with the organization’s pro-peace and anti-violence beliefs. While gun violence can rapidly escalate and plague a community, we caution against the use of the disease terminology, and any reference to the theory should be uncoupled from racially charged implications that perpetuate discrimination.

The role of violence interrupters to prevent gun violence

The Cure Violence model emphasizes the role of “credible messengers.”

As noted earlier, violence interrupters are often born and raised in the areas that they serve. They are trusted by their neighbors, and many have previous experience with the criminal legal system (former gang members or drug dealers, or they have been involved in past violence—they have “street credibility”).³⁰ This unique perspective enables them to intervene when they sense escalation and successfully mediate.

Gun violence
is a form of war
in communities
that FCNL
seeks to end.

Violence
interrupters
are often born
and raised in
the areas that
they serve.

28. Butts et al. (2015). *Cure Violence: A Public Health Model to Reduce Gun Violence*.

29. Good, M.-J. D., James, C., Good, B. J., & Becker, A. E. (2003). *The Culture of Medicine and Racial, Ethnic and Class Disparities in Health Care*. Department of Social Medicine, Harvard Medical School.

30. Fox, et al. (2012). *Final Evaluation of the Phoenix TRUCE Project: A Replication of Chicago CeaseFire*. Arizona State University Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety.



“When I am out there, I’m locked in. I know what it feels like to lose a child. I know what it feels like I would not give it up for anything in the world. I have a passion for people.”

— Nicole Warren, a violence interrupter with Safe Streets Baltimore, speaking at FCNL’s Spring Lobby Weekend 2023

Violence interrupters use a case management model to target and build relationships with individuals who are at high risk of being involved in a shooting or homicide (as a victim or offender)³¹.

Trained interrupters meet with the at-risk locals several times a week and work together to help improve their circumstances. This public health-inspired approach to gun violence may connect high-risk individuals to social services, housing, job training, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship. They can help people access mental health services, drug treatment, or help them leave gangs. They also support building relationships and trust within communities.

A key strategy of violence interrupter programs is to meet basic human needs that, when absent, contribute to cycles of violence. This honors the dignity of impacted individuals and communities and may encourage them to pay it forward.

Violence interrupters as community assets

Studies show that targeted intervention programs also reduce recidivism³² (repeated criminal behavior and reincarceration) in individuals with previous firearm convictions.

31. The VI work at FCNL is a new program that involves interviewing academics, practitioners, and violence interrupters. This claim was derived from those conversations.

32. Ostermann, M., Costa, J., Gunn, J., & Hohl, B. (2020). *Recidivism and criminal histories of gun offenders*. *Injury Prevention*, 26(Suppl 1), A34.2.

Furthermore, violence interrupters benefit the community by visiting schools that are potential hotspots, organizing events, and fostering dialogue between stakeholders. Community building and simple changes in the environment can remind impacted individuals that positive engagements are possible, and violence is not inevitable³³.

Traditional policing alone is not enough

Instead of addressing the root causes of gun violence, the criminal legal system both causes and reinforces racial inequalities³⁴. The deep distrust of police in these communities makes prevention of violence difficult³⁵.

Data shows that heightened law enforcement alone does not reduce gun violence³⁶. Despite consistent increases in police budgets (a 179 percent increase between 1977 and 2019)³⁷, murders increased in 2020 and violent crimes spiked in 2022³⁸.

The history of over-policing in marginalized communities contributes to the mass incarceration that disproportionately affects communities of color³⁹. Police approach gun violence through deterrence and suppression⁴⁰. Deterrence uses force to confront crime. Suppression solves crime through penalization—a practice that does not restore communities and individuals.

Having a criminal record greatly decreases opportunities for economic advancement following imprisonment, contributing to high rates of recidivism. Practices, such as stop and frisk, worsen psychological trauma⁴¹.

While not a replacement for law enforcement, violence interrupters aid and heal communities in ways that law enforcement is not structured to respond.

Violence is not inevitable.

While not a replacement for law enforcement, violence interrupters aid and heal communities in ways that law enforcement is not structured to respond.

33. Jannetta, J., Martinez, R., Thompson, P., Zweig, J. M., Robin, L., Courtney, L., Cramer, L., Ervin, S., Matei, A., & White, K. (2022). *A Research-Based Practice Guide to Reduce Youth Gun and Gang/Group Violence*. Urban Institute Research Paper.

34. Slagter, L. (2023, January 24). *Gun control measures associated with reduced police use of force*. Poverty Solutions.

35. Fox, et al. (2012). 'Final Evaluation of the Phoenix TRUCE Project: A Replication of Chicago CeaseFire.' Arizona State University Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety.

36. Henderson, H., & Brown, D. (2022, March 31). *Preventing gun violence takes more than police*. Brookings.

37. Urban Institute. (n.d.). *Criminal Justice Expenditures: Police, Corrections, and Courts*.

38. Gramlich, J. (2022, October 31). *Violent crime is a key midterm voting issue, but what does the data say?*

39. Solomon, D. (2016, September 1). *The Intersection of Policing and Race*. Center on American Progress.

40. Butts et al. (2015). *Cure Violence: A Public Health Model to Reduce Gun Violence*.

41. Del Toro, J., Lloyd, T., Buchanan, K. S., Goff, P. A., & others. (2019, April 8). *The criminogenic and psychological effects of police stops on adolescent black and Latino boys*. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Violence interrupters and systemic change

Interrupters approach gun violence by building and leveraging relationships in a community. Their job is not to solve crimes or take guns off the streets. Their on-the-ground perspective, training, and trust within the community give them the leverage to interrupt violence at its source. Doing so, they may limit the need for police engagement.

Although there is mutual respect, violence interrupter programs do not work directly with law enforcement. This ensures they maintain trust within the community. Occasionally, they may receive intel from police as to where they should focus their attention (i.e., an argument has become physical, guns are present, etc.)⁴².

Violence interrupters serve a purpose distinct from the police. While they aim to immediately reduce violence, their programs also focus on achieving long-term systemic change to sustainably decrease violence⁴³.

The spread of violence prevention programs

After Chicago's success, other cities, in and outside of the United States, adopted the Cure Violence approach. The repeated effectiveness of the program in diverse environments supports the claim that scaling up these programs can impact lasting change and save lives. Today, Cure Violence oversees over 26 programs across 23 cities, with 11 programs operating internally within 5 countries.

Evidence of violence prevention: New York and Philadelphia

John Jay College of Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center compared two New York neighborhoods using violence interruption programs to similar neighborhoods that did not implement the programs.

Evaluation of gun violence between 2015-2017 showed significant reductions attributable to the Man Up in East Brooklyn and Save our Streets in the South Bronx prevention programs⁴⁴. It is worth noting that the former has received gender and patriarchy-related criticism beyond this paper's scope.

Their on-the-ground perspective, training, and trust within the community give them the leverage to interrupt violence at its source.

42. Fox, et al. (2012). *'Final Evaluation of the Phoenix TRUCE Project: A Replication of Chicago CeaseFire.'* Arizona State University Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety.

43. Lopez, German. *"The evidence for violence interrupters doesn't support the hype."* Vox. (2021).

44. Delgado, S. A., Alsabahi, L., Wolff, K., Alexander, N., Cobar, P., & Butts, J. A. (2017). *Denormalizing Violence: A Series of Reports From the John Jay College Evaluation of Cure Violence Programs in New York City.*



In 2019, violence interrupters group Safe Streets Baltimore in the city's Cherry Hill neighborhood facilitated 365 days without a single shooting.



After implementing its version of the Cure Violence model, Philadelphia CeaseFire saw a 30% reduction in shootings from data recorded 24 months before its implementation.

CeaseFire also resulted in a statistically significant reduction in both total shootings and shootings of individuals between the ages of 10 and 35.⁵⁰

Gun injuries fell by 50 percent in the East Brooklyn neighborhood and only 5 percent in the control neighborhood of Flatbush. The South Bronx neighborhood saw a 37 percent decline in gun injuries compared to the control neighborhood in Harlem⁴⁵.

Decreased shootings and injuries are something to celebrate, however, sustaining those numbers requires cultural change. In that area, the New York programs excelled. The same study found that serious and petty disputes significantly declined in the program sites and a willingness to call the police increased⁴⁶.

Slightly farther south, the Cure Violence program Philadelphia Ceasefire produced similar results: a 30 percent drop in the shooting rate in the three areas in which the program was implemented⁴⁷.

Safe Streets Baltimore

Between 2007 and 2021, violence interrupter programs started in 11 neighborhoods at elevated risk for gun violence in Baltimore, Md. Prevention efforts, led by Safe Streets Baltimore, reduced homicides by up to 32 percent at some sites⁴⁸.

Initiated in 2015, the violence prevention program in Baltimore's Cherry Hill neighborhood led to three separate years without any shootings. In 2021 alone, violence interrupters successfully defused roughly 400 potentially violent conflicts⁴⁹.

45. Cure Violence. (2022). *The Evidence of Effectiveness*.

46. *ibid*

47. Roman, C.G., Klein, H., Wolff, K.T., Bellamy, M.D., & Reeves, K. (2017). *Philadelphia CeaseFire: Findings from the Impact Evaluation*. Temple University.

48. Webster, D. W., Tilchin, C. G., & Doucette, M. L. (2023). *Estimating the Effects of Safe Streets Baltimore on Gun Violence 2007–2022*.

49. ABC WMAR Channel 2. (2021, June 24). *Cherry Hill Safe Streets celebrates 365 days of life*.

50. *Cure Violence*. (2018).

Program funding

Issues of community-based violence stem from larger societal issues, meaning cities and states cannot carry the load of addressing them alone. Just as the federal government helps fund other public health measures at the local level, federal support is necessary for the growth and sustainability of these community-changing initiatives.

Programs need time to work, but evidence supporting the effectiveness of violence protection programs is gradually becoming more apparent. While results vary across different program locations, the key to success appears to be sustained funding and long-term support by stakeholders⁵¹.

The bulk of program funding comes from city governments, with nonprofit and federal support. Funding is needed to pay general program costs, training, and violence interrupter salaries.

Salaries for violence interrupters range but are an average of \$28,000 to \$36,000 with supervisors making around \$50,000 per year⁵²—low pay for a job that is often dangerous.

The main source of federal funding is the Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative (CVI)⁵³, which awards grants at the local and state levels in support of violence prevention programs.

Violence prevention saves lives and money

Gun violence in the U.S. is estimated to cost the nation more than \$550 billion per year⁵⁴. Prevention programs not only save lives but also taxpayer dollars. Cure Violence estimates that \$33 is saved for every dollar spent on violence prevention⁵⁵.

Issues of community-based violence stem from larger societal issues, meaning cities and states cannot carry the load of addressing them alone.

51. Lopez, German. *"The evidence for violence interrupters doesn't support the hype."* Vox. (2021)

52. Mascia, J. (2021, March 2). *The Push to Pay Violence Interrupters a Living Wage*. The Trace.

53. Bureau of Justice Assistance. (2022, April 19). *Community Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative (CVIPI) | Overview*.

54. Everytown for Gun Safety. (2022, July 19). *The Economic Cost of Gun Violence: \$557 Billion Annually, Comparable to 2.6 Percent of US Gross Domestic Product*.

55. Cure Violence. (2022). *The Evidence of Effectiveness*.

Scaling Up Violence Prevention Through Public Policy

Steps forward in gun policy

Despite the challenges in passing bipartisan legislation on gun violence, a response to gun violence in Texas shows there is a precedence for prompt action.

In 2022, following the horrific shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, the U.S. Congress took steps to address gun violence with the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act⁵⁶. The legislation was the first federal gun legislation passed since 1994.

The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, an important step forward, made several changes to the mental health system, school safety programs, and gun control laws. Notably, it included an unprecedented \$250 million investment in community violence programs.

The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act ... included an unprecedented \$250 million investment in community violence programs.

Congressional pushback

Although many violence prevention programs modeled on Cure Violence have shown remarkable success, support in the U.S. Congress is mixed.

Pushback against violence prevention programs in Congress is generally based on:

- Program Effectiveness
- Policy Priorities of the Member of Congress
- Budget Concerns
- Gun Rights

Program effectiveness

It is a challenge to quantify lives saved. Counting injuries and deaths from gun violence is more straightforward. Yet, violence interrupter programs have been proven to work. A study by Johns Hopkins University detailed an average 32% reduction in homicides across several sites over a four-year period in Baltimore, Maryland.⁵⁷

32%
reduction in homicides across several sites over a four-year period in Baltimore, Maryland.

Johns Hopkins study

56. White House. ***FACT SHEET: The President's Budget Tackles Crime, Keeps Americans Safe at Home.***

57. ***Estimating the Effects of Safe Streets Baltimore on Gun Violence.***

Congressional focus

Members of Congress tend to prioritize issues in their own states and districts. For instance, a Senator from Arkansas might not be immediately concerned with events in NYC's Utica Avenue or Baltimore's Sandtown-Winchester. Yet, as some of those members of Congress emphasize global competitiveness and small business growth, it is essential to recognize that local gun violence can hinder entrepreneurship.⁵⁸ These issues are interconnected.

Local gun violence not only threatens the safety of communities, but it also creates an unstable environment for commerce, deterring investment and stifling the growth of small businesses essential for economic vitality.⁵⁹

Budget concerns

Conservative congressmembers often scrutinize government spending, especially outside of defense. While violence interruption programs constitute a small part of the federal budget, their value can be supported with data and personal stories.

Furthermore, preventing gun violence could save taxpayers billions of dollars annually. These savings come from avoiding considerable costs resulting from gun violence, like hospitalizations, housing, decreased police enforcement efforts, and other expenses that are not realized.⁶⁰ A Johns Hopkins University study quantified the cost of gun violence to the nation at \$4.8 million per person shot, meaning violence interrupter programs have significant positive budget implications.⁶¹

Local gun violence not only threatens the safety of communities, but it also creates an unstable environment for commerce.

58. Greenbaum, R. T., & Tita, G. E. (2004). "*The impact of violence surges on neighbourhood business activity.*"

59. Sharkey, P., & Torrats-Espinosa, G. (2017). "*The effect of violent crime on Economic Mobility.*" *Journal of Urban Economics*

60. Joint Economic Committee Democrats. *The Economic Toll of Gun Violence* (n.d.)

61. *Estimating the Effects of Safe Streets Baltimore on Gun Violence.*

Gun rights

While it is important to push for larger gun violence prevention work, violence interrupters are a solid entry point—one that even proponents of the Second Amendment (which protects the right of individuals to keep and bear arms) should be able to support in the name of saving lives. Violence interrupters present an opportunity for firm supporters of the Second Amendment to advance solutions to end gun violence without legislating gun control measures.

In previous attempts to regulate gun transactions, staunch supporters of Second Amendment rights would regularly and fervently proclaim that we do not need new laws; we just need to “enforce the laws already on the books!”⁶² The work of violence interrupters does not challenge that position; their focus is on preventing the deadly use of guns during community-level disagreements, not governing guns.

The work of violence interrupters ... is on preventing the deadly use of guns during community-level disagreements, not governing guns.

62. Bedford, S. “*Democrats call for more gun laws despite not enforcing the ones they have.*” Washington Examiner. (2023)

Policy Recommendations

Increase funding for the Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative (CVI) before the funds from the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act expire in 2026⁶³.

A history of bipartisan support

Since 2021, violence prevention initiatives have garnered bipartisan support, affirming the effectiveness of the programs.

In the 2019 federal budget, Congress awarded \$8 million⁶⁴ to the Community-Based Violence Initiative, the predecessor to the Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative (CVI), which, In the 2021 budget, the program received \$14 million⁶⁵.

CVI received a \$50 million appropriation in both the 2022⁶⁶ and 2023⁶⁷ federal budgets. CVI continued at a funding level of \$50 million in fiscal year 2024 despite an overall cut in the encompassing subcommittee bill.⁶⁸

However, violence prevention programs are still counting on a special provision in the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act⁶⁹. This bill passed in 2022 provided a substantial funding stream (\$250 million) that helped to build capacity and even create new violence interrupter programs where there previously were none. These funds expire in 2026.

The looming expiration of funds from the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act in 2026 underscores the urgency of this matter.

63. ***“Legislative ask: Invest in Violence Interrupters.”*** (October 2023). Friends Committee on National Legislation.

64. 116th Congress. (2019). ***Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020.*** Public Law 116–93. Enacted December 20, 2019.

65. 116th Congress. (2020). ***Making consolidated appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2021, providing coronavirus emergency response and relief, and for other purposes.*** Public Law 116–260. Enacted December 27, 2020.

66. 117th Congress. (2022). ***Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022.*** Public Law 117–103. Enacted March 15, 2022.

67. 117th Congress. (2022). ***Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023.*** Public Law 117–328. Enacted December 29, 2022.

68. 118th Congress. (2024). ***Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024.*** Public Law 118–42. Enacted March 09, 2024.

69. 117th Congress (2022). ***Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.*** Public Law: 117-159. Enacted June 25, 2022.

Advocacy is the way forward

Funding for violence interrupter programs must be increased before the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act funds expire. Advocacy is key to bridging the gap in knowledge between Congress and communities facing gun violence.

White House support of violence intervention programs

In September 2023, support for community violence intervention programs received a major boost when President Biden announced the first-ever White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention⁷⁰.

Created to “reduce gun violence, which has ravaged communities across the country, and implement and expand upon key executive and legislative action which has been taken to save lives,” the office will enable the President to implement gun prevention legislation, including the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.

As Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott said, “Dismantling the forces that drive gun violence in our neighborhoods will take cooperation at every level of government and community.”⁷¹ This new office demonstrates a commitment from the top to catalyze change.

“Dismantling the forces that drive gun violence in our neighborhoods will take cooperation at every level of government and community”

Brandon Scott,
mayor, City of
Baltimore

70. White House. (2023, September 21). ***President Joe Biden to Establish First-Ever White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention, To Be Overseen by Vice President Kamala Harris.***

71. Mayor’s Office of Baltimore City. (2023, September 23). ***Mayor Scott Statement on President Biden’s Newly-Formed White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention.***

Conclusion

The pervasive issue of gun violence in the United States is a multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive and human-centered approach. Rooted in systemic inequalities, historical trauma, and societal neglect, gun violence disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, particularly Black and Brown neighborhoods. However, the emergence of violence interrupter programs, grounded in the principles of restorative justice, offers a beacon of hope. These programs, which view violence as a preventable and transmissible behavior, have shown that change is possible.

However, the sustainability and expansion of these programs hinge on consistent and robust funding. While there have been significant strides in securing bipartisan support and federal funding for violence prevention initiatives, more proactive efforts are needed. The looming expiration of funds from the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act in 2026 underscores the urgency of this matter.

The path to a more peaceful and just America lies in understanding the deep-seated roots of gun violence and embracing community-led, restorative approaches like violence interruption programs—programs that embrace Quaker values of Inner Light and dignity. It is imperative for policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders to unite in their efforts, advocate for increased funding, and champion policies that prioritize the well-being and dignity of all individuals. Together, we can forge a future where no person feels violence is a viable solution.

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Acknowledgements

- *Center for American Progress series*
- *Cities United*
- *Cure Violence*
- *The Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions*
- *Peace for DC*
- *Philadelphia Ceasefire*
- *Safe Streets Baltimore*

Rooted in Restorative Justice, Violence Interrupters Increase the Peace

AN FCNL ANALYSIS OF POLICY, PRACTICE, AND LITERATURE



José Santos Moreno

José Santos (Woss) Moreno is FCNL's director for justice reform. He leads FCNL's work on justice reform, election integrity, and policing. He helps to lead the Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition, an alliance of more than 40 national faith groups advocating to end mass incarceration.

Prior to joining FCNL, José was the Policy Fellow for the American Friends Service Committee bringing Quaker values to a busy policy portfolio consisting of criminal justice reform, human rights, and peacebuilding research. His passion for racial justice led him to help lead a coalition advocating for the human rights of Dominicans of Haitian descent facing statelessness. Before joining the Quaker community he lobbied on public health and appropriations for a large, international law firm. José started his career in public policy working in the United States Senate. While working for Senator Robert Menendez Jose built a robust understanding of public policy, legislative process, and effectively communicating policy / politics to constituents.

Before his time in the Senate, Jose was a social worker for HIV-positive clients in New York City. While attending Montclair State University and right after graduating he served as an AmeriCorps member in a community-based, immigrant-serving nonprofit helping recently-arrived African refugees in New Jersey. He also provided French interpretation and translation services for Survivors of Torture counseling and USCIS asylum interviews. José's national service and time as a social worker illustrated the ways society and institutions are built to leave so many people behind.

Jose is a proud son of immigrants who's passionate about political process, public service, and social justice. Jose is fluent in three languages. He attained the degree of Master of Public Administration from American University and is a graduate of Montclair State University. Jose is a member of Friends Meeting of Washington.



Kristen Archer

Kristen is FCNL's former social media & editorial director. She helped to engage and expand FCNL's online community and amplify its voice through social media. In this role, she also developed long-form editorial content and serves as an in-house writing trainer for Program Assistants and other colleagues.

Prior to joining FCNL in 2022, Kristen served as a communications consultant for the organization for nearly five years. During that time, she also developed robust communications campaigns and live events to tell the stories of other nonprofit, corporate, and individual clients, including Mark43, the Alliance to End Hunger, the Hurston/Wright Foundation, the Emerging Scholars Program, WomenHeart, YMCA of Metropolitan Washington, and more.

Kristen previously served as media relations manager at Bread for the World, following her tenure with Ogilvy Washington's Specialized Communications practice.

Kristen holds a B.A. in Journalism and Mass Communications from Washington and Lee University, and serves on the school's Alumni Board of Visitors. She received a master's in Public Communication from American University, and is pursuing a second M.A. in Counseling for Mental Health and Wellness from New York University.



Anika Forrest

Anika Forrest leads FCNL's domestic policy team. In this role, she guides the team's legislative and policy strategy and directs the migration policy program. Previously she served as FCNL's legislative manager for migration policy.

Before coming to FCNL, Anika was a legislative aide for former Philadelphia Councilmember Helen Gym. There, she worked on immigrant detention, deportation, racial economic disparities, and housing insecurity. Her foreign policy background includes experiences with USAID, the Organization of American States' Inter-American Juridical Committee, and the Embassy of Jamaica in Washington, D.C.

Anika is an adjunct professor at Temple University Beasley School of Law. She holds a J.D. from TempleLaw and a B.A. in Sociology from Davidson College. Her writing has appeared in *The Hill*, *Just Security*, *The AFRO*, and *Religion Unplugged*.

Anika's experiences with Quakerism as a Westtown School alumna and former admission counselor at Haverford College profoundly anchor her resolution to seek dignity, justice, and protection for vulnerable communities. As the daughter of immigrants, Anika is unapologetically committed to advancing community-engaged movements to cultivate an equitable, humane, and inclusive future.



Friends Committee on National Legislation

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