



Massachusetts Coalition To Prevent Gun Violence

December 3, 2020

Dear Governor Baker,

I write on behalf of the Massachusetts Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence in strong support of bill S.2963 - *An Act relative to justice, equity and accountability in law enforcement in the Commonwealth*. The Massachusetts Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence is an umbrella organization of more than 100 member groups dedicated to ending gun violence in all of its forms in Massachusetts. We know that police violence is gun violence and we strongly urge you to sign this bill into law.

Police use of force is one of the leading causes of death for young men of color.¹ We applaud the legislature for including provisions to limit the use of force by police officers, require de-escalation techniques, and limit the use of no-knock warrants, all of which will make the lives of people of color in Massachusetts safer.

The provisions of this bill that increase police accountability, such as the creation of the civilian led Police Officer Standards and Training Board and empowering the Attorney General to prosecute patterns of bad behavior by officers will help to ensure that when misconduct does occur, impacted communities can receive justice. Holding officers accountable for their behavior will help to repair the fractured relationship between police officers and the communities that are overpoliced, creating a safer community for all.

We stand strongly in support of the provisions of this bill which expand expungement eligibility for young people. Young people who have a criminal record face life-long barriers to housing, education, and employment, limiting opportunities for future success. Studies have found that expungement is linked to increased employment opportunities, greater access to housing, and reduced rates of recidivism.² As many youth are involved with the criminal justice system because of firearm related crimes, reduced rates of recidivism will logically lead to reduced rates of gun violence.

¹ Edwards, F., Lee, H., & Esposito, M. (2019). Risk of being killed by police use of force in the United States by age, race-ethnicity, and sex. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 116(34), 16793–16798. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1821204116>

² Adams, E. B., Chen, E. Y., & Chapman, R. (2017). Erasing the mark of a criminal past: Ex-offenders' expectations and experiences with record clearance. *Punishment & Society*, 19(1), 23–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474516645688>

The need to address police violence has never been more urgent. Protests against police brutality and racial injustice continue around the country, and gun violence continues to rise in Massachusetts with several cities around the Commonwealth seeing more than a 50% increase in shootings this year.³ The gun violence we are seeing must be considered in relation to police violence and the calls for systemic change. Black and Brown communities experience disproportionate rates of gun violence, as well the highest rates of over-policing.⁴ The communities with the highest police presence are still losing children, parents, and siblings to gun violence far too often, making it clear that the current relationship between communities of color and law enforcement is not reducing violence.

While there is still more work to be done, signing this bill is a vital first step towards repairing the relationship between police officers and communities of color, creating more accountability for police officers, and addressing injustices in the criminal justice system. These provisions will reduce police violence, promote racial justice, and ultimately reduce gun violence in the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Ruth Zakarin
Executive Director
Massachusetts Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence

³Anderson, T. (2020, October 21). Police chiefs, citing rise in shootings, say they're working with US authorities to jail repeat offenders. *Boston Globe*. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/10/21/metro/police-chiefs-cite-increase-shootings-working-with-federal-authorities-battle-escalating-gun-crime-mass/>

⁴ Edwards, F., Lee, H., & Esposito, M. (2019). Risk of being killed by police use of force in the United States by age, race-ethnicity, and sex. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 116(34), 16793–16798. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1821204116>