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House of Representatives  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HARRISBURG

COMMITTEES

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PREPAREDNESS

December 7, 2007

RE: Crime and Gun Violence in Pennsylvania

Dear Members of the Pennsylvania of House Representatives:

We have had numerous studies and recommendations from various commissions and agencies from the local municipalities as well as the state level of government. However the implementation, funding sources, and follow up appeared to be stymied. This process with other variables has partially impacted the violence epidemic addressing the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's citizenry.

I have taken the liberty to have my district office staff prepare the attached summaries for your perusal. Their comments whole the following captions:

Current State of Crime and Gun Violence

What went Wrong Systemically?

Youth Violence Prevention

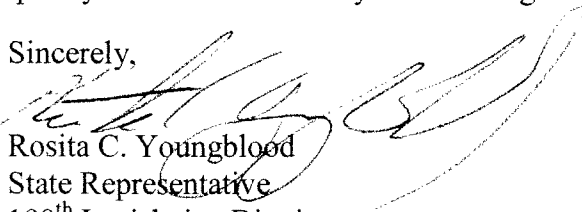
Addressing the Problems

Statistical, Financial, Social and Medical Impact

It is noteworthy to mention that Representatives W. Curtis Thomas, Angel Cruz and other members will provide commentary on other directly related issues that are imperative and providing the appropriate methodology, implementation, technical assistance and funding sources.

Moreover, the Legislative Office for Research Liaison, Local Government Commission, Joint State Government and the House of Representative chairmen of the committees listed in said mention summary can form a cohesive partnership to finalize a report and measures for implementation. Our goals are to guarantee that gun violence and crime prevention measures are positioned to ensure the quality of life for all Pennsylvanian's regardless of socio-economic background.

Sincerely,

  
Rosita C. Youngblood  
State Representative  
198<sup>th</sup> Legislative District

Attachments:

# **Summary on Gun Violence and Crime Prevention in Pennsylvania**

As Written and Prepared by  
State Representative Rosita C. Youngblood and Legislative Staff  
198<sup>th</sup> Legislative District  
Submitted for House Review on  
**December 10, 2007**

# Summary on Gun Violence and Crime Prevention in Pennsylvania

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December 7, 2007

Submitted by Courtney Lewis, Chief of Staff 198<sup>th</sup> District

## **Current State of Crime and Gun Violence in Pennsylvania**

While legislators are up in arms over prioritizing the issue of gun control, the residents of this Commonwealth has declared a state of emergency. Whether it's Philadelphia, Allegheny, Erie or Susquehanna, no county is immune to the crime, violence, and victimization that can occur at the hands of a gun. You can't paint a color on the face of crime and say that this is a black issue or Hispanic issue. Nor can you place the crime in a certain area of Pennsylvania and call it a rural or urban issue. Members of the Legislative Black Caucus could not sit back and allow this issue to be tabled for a more convenient time. Murder, death, crime, gun violence in our great Commonwealth is never convenient. Open records and hazardous materials are important issues that need to be addressed, but everyday our district offices are confronted by constituents who demand help for this growing problem of keeping their children and families safe.

It's unfortunate that 12 members of the legislature had to walk out of session in order for the Commonwealth to recognize that this issue is important. Legislators can sit back and follow protocol or they can follow their hearts and do what's right. Some legislators could not find solidarity on this issue. As legislators, you can not be driven by other forces of manipulation. You work for your constituents. They trust that you have their best interest in mind when you introduce legislation to better their quality of life.

Just weeks ago Philadelphians had to bury one of our heroes. Police Officer Chuck Cassidy was laid to rest after being shot by a handgun. This murder crushed the hearts of not only Philadelphians but Americans. Everyday somebody's hero is being slain, and some of our counties are like war zones. This is in fact a state of emergency, and every victim in this vicious escapade of crime should get purple hearts. Every mother who walks her child to school safely, every young person who makes it home alive, every store owner who can open up their store another day, every worker who can make it from work to their homes safely, each and every one of us deserve medals of bravery because we make a choice to live a compassionate empathetic life regardless of our fears. This choice that so many of us make has now become an act of heroism.

## **What Went Wrong Systemically?**

So we ask whose problem is this, and who do we hold accountable for this growing epidemic? Statistics show that we can not fix the problem of gun violence and crime prevention without addressing the root causes. First we must address educational reform, unemployment, family structure (where are our children, and who is caring for them), and addressing healthcare along with the behavioral and mental health issues.

At both the federal and state level there have been a number of programs, models, and commissions that have been created and funded to address this problem. However, we can not

fund studies and reports to address violence and crime prevention, acknowledge what programs are necessary to combat these problems, then rely upon DHS and other agency's to implement them by making them "Best Practices." How can we depend on underfunded agencies and social welfare organizations to implement new programs without giving them the funding to sustain these programs?

A holistic approach is necessary in reducing crime and gun violence. *The Blue Print for Violence Prevention* is just one of the models that can provide the training and technical assistance that these agency's and organizations need to begin implementing viable programs to address the issue. *Smart Cards* are another viable incentive based program to encourage students to stay on track. There are many, many more programs that may be a solution to our problems, and no one is asking legislature to re-invent the wheel.

### Addressing the Problem

We are beyond the point of recommendations. We have already formed the commissions and read the reports. It is time to take action.

1. There needs to be a *collaboration* of these committee chairs so that we can find the funding that is necessary to sustain the agency's that we are telling to produce results.
2. We also need to *establish criteria* to find out which agency is the best one to deliver the services.
3. We need to set goals and find a means to *evaluate* these programs to see if they are effective and able to meet the needs of the community.
4. We also need *cooperation* from local government. We need to bring together mayors, police commissioners, police captains, district attorneys and judges. Lets all work as a cohesive team, those entities that create the laws and those who enforce it.

It will take a joint effort to produce legislation that will prevent crime and violence. It is crucial that we address:

- ✓ Gun violence
- ✓ Enforce existing laws on straw purchases
- ✓ Acknowledge the systemic issues that affect the dynamics of education, family structure, access to behavioral health services, healthcare, and employment in Pennsylvania

Collectively legislators have the power to turn around this problem. We can't always be reactive, we have to be proactive in introducing preventative measures to fight crime and gun violence in this Commonwealth.

December 7, 2007

Submitted by Wally Beltran, Legislative Assistant 198<sup>th</sup> District

**and Courtney Lewis, Chief of Staff**

## **Youth Violence**

Youth crime is an ever growing problem in Pennsylvania. We don't need a commission or a special report to tell us that youth crime is increasing at an alarming rate. We see it everyday. There are many factors that can affect violent tendencies in youth. They include changes to a young person's environment; various forms of domestic violence that they may witness at home; physical, psychological, emotional and sexual abuse inflicted upon them; bullying and harassment from their peers.

In order to reduce violence and aggression in children and youth, there is a need to focus on program and policy changes at all levels of the community. Today's urban youth lack meaningful alternatives to street crimes. Young people want adult leaders to take action and reduce youth violence in their schools, communities and neighborhoods by enforcing stricter gun laws, providing after-schools programs, and making jobs accessible to young people to get them off of the streets.

## **Breakdown of Crucial Institutions**

There was a time when schools were viewed as a safe haven for young people. Students may not be the smartest pupil in class or get along with all of their peers, but it was a safe environment where young people knew that school administrators had their best interest at heart. Young people could expect at least two meals a day, warmth when its cold, a high quality education provided by qualified teachers and administrators, and access to special programs and afterschool activities that exposed them to new opportunities to expand their minds creatively, and culturally.

Now, we have to take into account the fact that there is a breakdown in the family structure along with a breakdown in the educational system. Babies are having babies, siblings are raising siblings, there is an increase in the number of single parents, many parents are strung out on drugs, and now Department of Human Services plays a major role in the family unit and how well it succeeds. Families are relying upon an institution to fulfill those needs that were not being met at home, an institution that is in dire need of reform. Many public schools are unsanitary, buildings are in desperate need of renovations, they employ uncertified teachers, and there is a lack of funding which has caused many schools to cut extra-curricular activities, music and arts programs. Safety in school is also a concern for young people. How can we expect schools to educate young people when students are afraid to show up? According to the 2005-06 Pennsylvania Department of Education's Annual School Safety Report:

- School incidents involving law enforcement has ***increased 12%***
- School fights have ***increased 68%***

- School bullying incidents have *increased 32%*

Preventing youth violence will require action at all levels of government and community. We can't let society give up on our youth. We can't allow our children to raise each other in the streets amidst a life of crime and violence. We have to find ways to off set the affects of youth violence in the early stages of development. The Governors Commission on Gun Violence recommends a comprehensive approach on combating the issue of youth violence:

- ✓ *Prevention*
- ✓ *Early intervention in the streets and at school*
- ✓ *Provide afterschool and community based programs*
- ✓ *Mobilize and engage the community*
- ✓ *Strengthen law enforcement*
- ✓ *Strengthen gun laws*

Our young people are the future of this commonwealth and we need to ensure that despite any challenges that they may face they are still afforded viable opportunities to be successful.

December 7, 2007

Submitted by Wilson Park, Legislative Assistant 198<sup>th</sup> District

## **Statistical, Financial, Medical and Social Impact**

It *seems* like we are doing a much better job concerning guns in the State of Pennsylvania. After all when we look back over the decades the statistics tells us we have less murder victims, by firearms, in the state of Pennsylvania today. For example there were 449 reported firearms related deaths in 2004 as opposed to 573 deaths reported more than a decade ago in 1993.

This *seems* like an impressive accomplishment. It seems that the gun law advocates are making a fuss over nothing. However if we look into the reasons behind the decline in homicide by firearms we will be surprised.

I was able to speak with a law enforcement agent and asked him about this particular statistical anomaly. Considering the firepower today's guns pack I thought this was curious. The law enforcement agent wasn't surprised by this fact. Stating, "Off the top of my head this makes sense." Explaining to me that even though firearms packed less punch in the 70's, 80's and 90's even a .22 caliber bullet proved to be fatal due to lacking medical technology available in decades past.

The good news is our medical technology is advancing beyond the increase in firearms power. But here's the bad news: we are not making any headway regarding guns in our state.

Rather than looking at the homicide rate, the law enforcement agent asked me to look at the aggravated assault statistics; "this will give you a better indication of gun violence." I was also asked to look into the total number of shootings and not the deaths. And in 3 years, from 2003-2005 there was an eleven percent increase in aggravated assault with firearms.

In 1980 there were 38,858 reported violent crimes, in 2005 there were 50,319. Another problem I faced when looking at the data is the number of unreported crimes or under reported crime. I can't even begin to estimate the numbers of unreported crimes. However, here we have a couple of examples of under-reported crime: 1. In 2004 agency cites 26,428 cases of aggravated assault while a different agency cites 28,339. 2. In 2005 the same agency cites 27,508 for the entire state while the other agency reports 29,205 aggravated assaults for 2005.

Philadelphia is currently the most afflicted county in the commonwealth due to lax laws regarding gun legislation. Making guns less accessible will lower incidence of gun violence and injury not only in the Philadelphia and Pennsylvania but for this country. In 2004 Philadelphia County alone had more deaths from guns than Canada, New Zealand, England and Wales combined. Also in the same year Pennsylvania had more gun deaths than Canada, New Zealand, England, Wales, Australia and Sweden combined; approximately 20% more. Simple fact is far too many guns are too easily accessible and used to commit violent crimes.

Within the years of 1996-2000 Philadelphia had 5 in the top 120 gun shops in the country for guns traced to crime; a distinction we should not be proud of. That's a total of 1487 crimes committed by guns traced to 5 of the 20 gun shops in Philadelphia County. This study does not show any single shop with less to 200 known crimes linked to the guns sold from their shops.

Licensee to carry permits, in 2005, accounted for 94.9 percent of the 107,078 total firearms permits in the state of Pennsylvania: 101, 643 License to Carry and only 5,435 Sportsman's Firearm Permits were processed by the State. Philadelphia county had 99.7 percent of its permits as License to Carry in 2005.

From 1990 to 2004 the State of Pennsylvania has had 6989 homicides by firearm and 4401 gun related homicides took place in Philadelphia County. That's nearly 63%!!! In the last 5 years the City of Philadelphia has had over 8,500 injuries related to firearms.

As a result of this epidemic in January of 2005 Philadelphia policymakers created Philadelphia's Gun Court to handle approximately 1200 gun related cases a year.

Not only does this jeopardize the physical welfare of the commonwealth gun related healthcare is draining its citizens, financially. Tax payers are responsible for about 85% of all medical costs due to firearm injury care. The number of firearms injuries in Philadelphia from 2002-2006 was 8686. The cost of medical attention per injured individual is about \$20,000. That's a total of about 180 million dollars in Philadelphia alone. The economic impact is almost as startling as the injuries and death incurred by guns.

In a city healthcare system already over run with understaffed hospital and suspension of certain services, the Temple University Hospital, Albert Einstein Hospital and the University of Pennsylvania Hospital sees nearly 40% of all gun related injuries. Gun related injuries are a serious problem for area hospitals.

Not only is there an astounding statistical, medical and financial impact but there is an incalculable social impact being felt in Philadelphia. Over 60% of gun related injuries are sustained by black men between the ages of 20-29. This is decimating the social fabric of our community: Parents burying their young sons, children losing their fathers, wives losing their husbands, and siblings losing their beloved brothers.

Fear is also gripping the city of Philadelphia. When criminals have blatant disregard for police officers and shoot at them. What chance does the average citizen have? Our loved ones are being ripped from us. And our way of life is in jeopardy due to the psychological, terrorism in our communities. When we no longer feel safe in the homes and communities we live in are losing the good fight.

We need to bring safety back into our communities. Countries with more stringent gun laws and less accessibility have much lower incidence of gun related injury and death. The commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as I noted earlier, had more gun related deaths in 2004 than five whole Countries combined. This should, in the least, tell us we have a growing gun problem in our Commonwealth.

# **Pennsylvania House of Representatives**

## **Recommendations of House Committees**

**Chairmen of the assigned stated committees' are recommended to establish and develop a prototype to eradicate gun violence, forge gun control and preventive methodology for the betterment of the citizenry that reside in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.**

**Appropriations**

**Children and Youth**

**Commerce**

**Education**

**Health and Human Services**

**Intergovernmental Affairs**

**Judiciary**

**Local Government**