

Invest in Violence Interrupters

For decades policymakers have debated how to address the epidemic of gun violence inflicting hundreds of communities across the United States. Too often, lawmakers have viewed violence as an independent problem rather than a result of larger societal harms like racial inequities or historical disinvestment in communities.

Traditionally, localities have responded to community-level violence by increasing the presence of a militarized police force. This approach has repeatedly failed, sometimes with fatal consequences that compound trauma and heighten violence. Communities cannot be protected from gun violence without addressing the root causes that perpetuate it.

A new solution led by communities offers a way forward: violence interrupter programs.

Violence interrupter programs employ credible messengers who have a connection to the communities they serve and experience with the justice system. This makes them effective at reaching those most at risk of engaging in violence. They intervene to mediate conflict before it escalates into violence.

Violence interrupters help mitigate violence before it happens by:

- » Encouraging dialogue and averting violent, sometimes deadly, conflict.
- » Coaching and assisting people in accessing social services.
- » Helping individuals attain critical documents needed to access employment and housing, such as state IDs, birth certificates, and social security cards.
- » Connecting individuals with mental health resources.
- » Building trust and community connections by visiting school grounds and potential hotspots for violence.
- » Organizing local events to spread the message of nonviolence.

The impact of these programs is palpable in the communities where they operate. A new study by the Center for Gun Violence Solutions of Johns Hopkins University revealed that Safe Streets—a violence interrupter program in Maryland—reduced homicides and nonfatal shootings overall from 2007 to 2022 in Baltimore. It reduced such shootings by as much as 32% in some sites.

These programs exemplify community violence intervention initiatives that help build safer communities. To sustain this life-saving work, Congress should invest at least \$60 million in federal funding for the Community Violence Intervention (CVI) program in the FY2025 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.

Invest in Community Violence Intervention Programs in the FY2025 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill

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