

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

September 13, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Schumer, and Chairman Pallone:

We write to urge you to advance violence prevention strategies that center the humanity and dignity of all who are impacted. Gun violence and other forms of violent crime disproportionately harm Black and Brown communities. We agree with public health experts that the gun violence epidemic is a public health crisis requiring a public health response. To effectively break the cycles of crime, we must invest in evidence-based approaches to safety and justice that meaningfully address the unmet needs of crime survivors and entire communities. Therefore, we write to express our strong support for investments in community violence intervention and trauma recovery in the Build Back Better Act.

Despite substantial increases in law enforcement expenditures, research has consistently shown that existing services fail to provide crime victims the assistance they need. Moreover, at a systemic level, America's most victimized people are persistently the least helped. Research from the Bureau of Justice Statistics has documented, for instance, that while young Black men who live in urban areas are at higher risk of violent victimization than any other population in the United States, they are the least likely group to have access to restorative justice opportunities, mental health treatment, and other services.¹

The vast majority of survivors of violence, especially repeat violence, experience one or more trauma symptoms. Moreover, a growing body of research demonstrates that untreated trauma, especially among those who experience repeat victimization, can contribute to substance abuse,

¹ Warnken, Heather; Lauritsen, Janet, *Who Experiences Violent Victimization and Who Accesses Services? Findings from the National Crime Victimization Survey for Expanding Our Reach* (April 2019)
<https://ncvc.dspacedirect.org/handle/20.500.11990/1230>

mental health issues, housing instability, or other problems that increase the risk of being a victim again in the future. Unaddressed childhood trauma, specifically, is a persistent and growing threat to our nation's public health. Children who are impacted too often develop trauma-related stress symptoms and become isolated and struggle to form interpersonal relationships. Not only is unaddressed childhood trauma a barrier to social development, but it is also linked to several leading causes of death in America, including heart disease, lung disease, substance use, and suicide.² Given this reality, it is clear that providing survivors of violence with a real opportunity to recover from trauma should be a fundamental goal of our public safety systems.

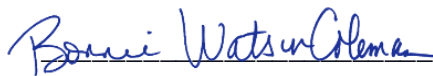
In the American Jobs Plan, President Biden envisions \$5 billion to invest in community violence prevention and intervention. This investment should be used to fund critical strategies centered on prevention and addressing the root causes of violence as a public health issue. In addition, it must be accompanied by an investment in comprehensive victims' services that are specifically focused on trauma recovery. We urge that Congress allocates \$5 billion for community violence intervention and \$700 million in additional resources to support trauma-informed violence intervention programs for our nation's crime survivors in every state. Further, we implore you to incorporate robust funding for local public health departments to address the root causes of childhood trauma with strategies that involve trusted, community-based organization and growing their capacity to provide targeted, culturally competent, gender-responsive, and trauma-informed care.

To rebuild a better, more just and equitable nation reeling from this devastating pandemic, it is crucial to invest in the infrastructure needed to support survivors of trauma and the mental wellbeing of our children. We look forward to working with you to ensure there is a more effective national response to community violence that reduces violence and takes into account the needs of crime survivors.

Sincerely,



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

² Felitti VJ, Anda RF, Nordenberg D, et al. (1997). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *Am J Prev Med.* 1998;14(4):245-258. doi:10.1016/s0749-3797(98)00017-8.

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress

Karen Bass
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Bennie Thompson
Member of Congress