

Our Collective Failure - Youth Gun Violence

Policing and Race Committee - February 2024

Since 2020, firearms have been the leading cause of death for children and adolescents aged 1 to 19 years old in the United States. From 2019 to 2020, the relative increase in the rate of firearm-related deaths of all types (suicide, homicide, unintentional, and undetermined) among children and adolescents was 29.5% — more than twice as high as the relative increase in the general population.¹ The Cincinnati area is seeing record numbers of juvenile gun violence victims. As of November 14, 2023, there had been 58 juvenile shooting victims, up from 35 at the same time in 2022 (nearly a 66% increase).² American gun culture and our inability to take action to regulate gun ownership (the US has 46% of the world's civilian owned guns³) has failed each and every one of these children by not prioritizing their safety.

In examining this crisis, these Study Pages look at the nationwide increase in gun purchases following a 2007 Supreme Court ruling and subsequent rulings that protect individual “gun rights” based on the Second Amendment. From there, we highlight recent Ohio legislation that evolved from the above rulings – legislation focused on permissible carry laws. We then outline how local communities including Cincinnati are responding to the above mentioned State legislation by enacting ordinances focused on gun regulation and safety. Lastly, we examine local programs, many of which came into existence as part of Cincinnati’s Collaborative Agreement, that build collaboration between the police, the community, and our youth – those that are most at risk of being harmed or perpetrating harm.

The Second Amendment and individual gun rights. As historian Carol Anderson notes in her book, “*The Second: Race and Guns in a Fatally Unequal America*,” the crafting of the Second Amendment was in response to concerns coming out of the Virginia ratification convention for the Constitution, that a militia that was controlled solely by the federal government would not be there to protect the slave owners from an enslaved uprising⁴. It was not until a landmark case out of the District of Columbia in 2007 – *District of Columbia v. Heller*, that the Supreme Court concentrated on the meaning of and application of the “right to bear arms.” Justice Scalia, writing for the 5-4 majority, concluded that the Second Amendment does provide an individual’s right to keep and bear arms for lawful purposes. The Court later expanded the right to bear arms to the states in *McDonald v City of Chicago* in 2010. Seemingly, this opened the floodgates to gun sales in the US as gun ownership increased from 304 million in 2008 to 393 million in 2022.⁵

Ohio legislation - In Ohio, a “Constitutional Carry” law passed in 2022. The law eliminates training requirements to carry a concealed weapon and makes obtaining a concealed handgun

¹ [Current Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States | NEJM](#)

² [Cincinnati struggling with 'record' juvenile gun violence, police say | WVXU](#)

³ [Guns, Violence and the Second Amendment | Bridgewater State University](#)

⁴ [Historian Carol Anderson Uncovers The Racist Roots Of The 2nd Amendment : NPR](#)

⁵ [Guns, Violence and the Second Amendment | Bridgewater State University](#)

license optional.⁶ Currently, Rep. Jean Schmidt, R-Loveland, is a sponsor for House Bill 51, which is called the “Second Amendment Preservation Act (SAPA).” This Act will prevent local police from enforcing federal firearms restrictions. The bill permits an Ohioan to take action against agencies who have violated the SAPA Act. Violations could lead to a lawsuit and a \$50,000 fine. Both Hamilton County Prosecutor Melissa Powers and Sheriff Charmaine McGuffey, oppose the bill.⁷

Ramifications for children Recent legislation has had significant ramifications for our children. An Everytown for Gun Safety Report finds that “Black and Latinx children and teens are impacted by gun violence at higher rates than their white peers, in part because of deliberate policy decisions that created segregated neighborhoods and under investments in their communities.” Black Americans experience 10 times more gun homicides and 18 times more gun assault injuries than white Americans. According to Dr. Mara Ostfeld of Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan, “gun violence in Black communities is very much rooted in the municipal, state, and federal institutions that have failed to protect Black Americans and often actively harmed them.” She goes on to say, “to address gun violence in Black communities, we need to first ensure that we are providing all Americans equal protection under the law.”⁸ Locally, those involved in Cincinnati’s 2023 reported shootings were 89.6% Black and 88.8% male.⁹

Local efforts to keep guns out of the hands of children. In February of 2023, Cincinnati City Council passed an ordinance requiring the safe storage of guns, specifically around children. It dictates that any parents or guardians who do not properly store their guns and “create a substantial risk to the health or safety of the child” can be charged with a first-degree misdemeanor. Possessing a firearm is illegal for someone convicted of domestic violence or subject to a court order restraining them from harassing, stalking, or threatening an intimate partner. Violators are subject to a misdemeanor charge punishable by up to one year in jail. The ordinance only became enforceable in September after Hamilton County Common Pleas Judge Jennifer Branch issued an injunction stopping the state from enforcing its “preemption law” limiting the ability of local municipalities to enact their own gun regulations. Recently Ohio’s Fifth District Court of Appeals dismissed the City of Columbus’ request to overturn a preliminary injunction against their safe storage ordinance.¹⁰

Cincinnati Police Chief Theetge believes that the increase in youth gun violence is partly due to the sheer number of guns on the streets. As of November 14, 2023, 646 guns had been reported stolen, 70% from cars.¹¹ In response, Cincinnati City Council unanimously passed two emergency ordinances codifying new gun regulations into Cincinnati law. Outgoing Cincinnati Councilwoman Liz Keating penned the ordinances targeting “negligent and irresponsible” gun owners. Keating described instances where someone left their gun on a seat at a restaurant and another who left their gun on top of the car and drove off. The first ordinance addresses the

⁶ [Ohio Constitutional Carry 2023: How Ohio's New Gun Law Works \(outsidethebadge.com\)](https://www.outsidethebadge.com/news/ohio-constitutional-carry-2023-how-ohios-new-gun-law-works/)

⁷ [Police, prosecutors worry Second Amendment bill will thwart gun probes \(cincinnati.com\)](https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/crime/2023/02/02/police-prosecutors-worry-second-amendment-bill-will-thwart-gun-probes/7041117002/)

⁸ [Black Children Are Disproportionately Hurt By Gun Violence—How Did We Get Here and What Do We Do Next? \(parents.com\)](https://www.parents.com/parents/parenting/child-safety/black-children-gun-violence/)

⁹ [Reported Shootings \(cincinnati-oh.gov\)](https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/newsroom/2023/02/02/reported-shootings/)

¹⁰ [New gun laws passed in Cincinnati, effective immediately \(wcpo.com\)](https://www.wcpo.com/news/cincinnati/cincinnati-city-council-passes-gun-storage-ordinance/)

¹¹ [Report: Skyrocketing gun violence against children, gun thefts in Cincinnati | WKRC \(local12.com\)](https://www.local12.com/news/cincinnati/skyrocketing-gun-violence-against-children-gun-thefts-in-cincinnati/)

revolving door of firearms, enacting locally the Ohio state law that requires gun owners to immediately report a lost or stolen firearm. If not reported, the gun owner is subject to a fourth-degree misdemeanor and a Class D civil penalty of \$750. The second ordinance would set a fee of \$200 for those seeking the return of their firearms from police to offset the cost of processing and storing the missing firearm.¹²

Conclusion We have come to rely upon legislation and community programming as the primary tools to address the gun violence crisis both nationally and locally, but it is not enough, especially when our children are dying and making life altering mistakes via guns. We must acknowledge how we uphold the institutional systems that Carol Anderson and Dr. Ostfeld point out and what author and Distinguished Professor at the City College of Brooklyn bell hooks (a pen name that the author never capitalized) referred to during her career. As a lecturer and writer, bell hooks focused on the connection among class, race and gender: categories and structures of domination that liberation movements in the United States and around the world faced and keep facing.¹³ She described the structures of domination as “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy.”

For those of us that are white, we have a responsibility to be involved in helping to make our community one that does ensure equal protection under the law for all of us. For the sake of our humanity, we have to protect all of our children. Our community is fortunate that we have the Collaborative Agreement to help guide us.

“Wanting to eliminate guns from our kids’ realities is not radical. Not wanting to traumatize our kids over and over is not radical. Wanting to live in a country that has not had more mass shootings than days this year (2023) is not radical. But you know what is radical? Bulletproof backpacks.” Saira Rao, Co-founder, Here4thekids. <https://here4thekids.com/>

Grassroot efforts that exist to address systemic problems that have a negative effect on children’s lives; problems that may lead to gun violence



1) [The Positive Force \(ennistaitministries.org\)](http://ennistaitministries.org)

“The Positive Force Collaborative is a regional movement that has been organized to address the top nine critical issues in the city of Cincinnati and Hamilton County:

- Poverty (Self-Sufficiency, Sustainability, Livable Wages)
- Violence (domestic and gun)
- Health disparities (infant mortality, depression, heart disease)
- Access to high-quality education

(Preschool and K-12) (Photo from the website)

- Unemployment/underemployment (Job Readiness and Skill Development)

¹² [New gun laws passed in Cincinnati, effective immediately \(wcpo.com\)](http://wcpo.com)

¹³ <https://usabroad.unibo.it/article/view/16500/15676> USABroad – Journal of American History and Politics.

- Police-Community Relations (Police Reform, Collaborative Agreement and Refresh)
- Re-entry (Returning Citizens)
- Trauma/Mental Illness (Intervention for Youth and Adults)
- Housing (Affordable and Home Ownership)

The Positive Force Collaborative works to build capacity around existing place-based and evidence-based initiatives, school-based programs, healthcare collaboratives and community-based projects.”

2) Cincinnati Police Youth Services - [Youth Services - Police \(cincinnati-oh.gov\)](http://cincinnati-oh.gov)

(Photo from the website.)



- The Children in Trauma Intervention Camp (CITI) is intended to inspire youth to excel personally and socially, learn to resolve conflict, and to respect themselves and others.
- The Summer Cadet Program gives students ages 16-19 the opportunity to work with police and learn about the career through summer programs.
- The Public Safety Cadet Program gives young adults the opportunity to explore a career in law enforcement by working with members of the CPD. It emphasizes character development, self-discipline, and academic study.

3) A Community Highlight, a first-person local story - Save our Youth Kings and Queens

Partners include The Harriet Beecher Stowe House, Moms Demand Action, Pathways to Life and UC School of Criminal Justice - [ABOUT | Save Our Youth Cinci \(saveouryouthcincinnati.com\)](http://saveouryouthcincinnati.com)

(Content and Photo from the website.)



“My name is Mitch Morris and I have been a community outreach worker in Cincinnati for many years. I go into hot spots to reach people who have no hope, to offer them something different, and to help them get jobs. My goal is to reduce gun violence on our streets. In my role with the Phoenix Program at Cincinnati Works, I have been able to help hundreds of adults in our neighborhoods. But there is a large, vulnerable group that our regular programs could not reach: youth.

“A few years ago, I started a business that hired youth to pick up paper and trash in the neighborhood. They were paid every week to help keep them out of trouble. I partnered then, and continue to partner now, with Ennis Tait Ministries in helping youth ages 14-17, including referring them to Cincinnati Works and other agencies when they turn 18.

“To reduce gun violence and crime among youth in Cincinnati, I want to start a traveling support group for youth, with referrals coming from the juvenile court system, Cincinnati Police Department, Public Defender's Office, schools, and other agencies. Youth would participate in a 3-month program, with meetings held two times per month. Each meeting would be held at a different location, such as the Harriet Beecher Stowe House or National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, where speakers would teach them about history, about who they are. In addition to staff at these locations, doctors and police officers would talk with the youth. The goal of this support group is to build hope within these youth and increase their respect and care for each other, ultimately reducing violence among them.”



4) Urban League of Greater Southwestern Ohio's (ULGSO) youth advocacy [ULGSO Urban Champions](#) is dedicated to equipping young people aged 14-19 with career awareness, exposure, and development.

With Cincinnati Children's Hospital, the City of Cincinnati, United Way and others as partners, students participate in virtual career training workshops, mock interviews, and job matching with employers eager to provide an enriching employment experience. (Photo from the website.)

5) Warren County police department programs

Warren County law enforcement agencies dedicate officer, trooper, and deputy time to build and grow relationships with students in K-12 schools. Dozens of School Resource Officers (SROs) are assigned to schools throughout the county. They visit classrooms and playgrounds and interact with the students, acting as coaches and mentors. Several officers conduct the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program educating students on the dangers of addiction, drugs, alcohol, and other aspects crucial to healthy growth. Deputies host National Night Out events in the late summer and assist with programs at Camp Kern. During the Warren County Fair, deputies are assigned to a Community Relations trailer to meet with children and to assist parents in applying for an Ohio ID card for their child/ren through the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles to use if a child is reported missing.

The Community Services Division assists other agencies, companies, and organizations in training, mentoring, and Meet and Greet programs. An annual "Shop with a Cop" event matches children with officers to guide children toward purchasing gifts for others.

Additionally, officers volunteer time in the schools and sports programs believing that productive relationships early in a child's life encourages positive encounters with officers in the child's future.

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Discussion Questions

1) The Policing and Race Committee agrees with this paragraph from the Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan: “Our faculty think, speak out...about structural inequality—about differential outcomes and experiences for Black people and other marginalized populations in education, policing, health, economics, finance, and other key systems...Racist violence and inequality in our systems, in the U.S. and abroad, are the result of centuries of laws, policies, and institutions that have entrenched and enforced white supremacy. Ford School faculty help lay those structures bare, through the overlapping lenses of sociology, history, economics, political science, and more.”

Question: When thinking about the immensity of this problem, what can be done?

2) “I was a medical student rotating on trauma surgery, watching a teenager die in front of me...with multiple (gunshot) bullet wounds. I went with the supervising doctor to tell the patient’s family. They erupted with grief. His mother rocked back and forth, asking God why her child was killed when he had harmed no one. Later, I overheard doctors discussing the patient: ‘Yeah, another one whose family claims he is innocent. That’s what they all say. I’m sure he was in a gang.’ I wondered if they treated all gun victims with such callousness or just the Black kids.” - [Amanda Joy Calhoun, MD, MPH](#) *Adult/Child Psychiatry Resident at Yale Child Study Center/Yale School of Medicine and Public Voices Fellow of the OpEd Project at Yale University.*

Question: Do you think this response is common? Where is your bias when you read about this event?

3) Which of these do you agree with/support and which ones do you not agree with/not support? Choose a few to discuss.

- The law that eliminated training requirements to carry a concealed weapon
- The law that made it optional to obtain a concealed handgun license
- “Second Amendment Preservation Act (SAPA).” If passed in Ohio, the Act will prevent local police from enforcing federal firearms restrictions.
- The perspective of Dr. Mara Ostfeld of Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan: “to address gun violence in Black communities, we need to first ensure that we are providing all Americans equal protection under the law.”
- The 2023 Cincinnati ordinance:
 - Parents or guardians who do not properly store their guns can be charged with a first-degree misdemeanor.
 - Possessing a firearm is illegal for someone convicted of domestic violence or subject of a restraining order.
- The Ohio state law that requires gun owners to immediately report a lost or stolen firearm

4) Ohio state laws are expanding gun owners’ options. Local laws are enhancing children’s and all citizens’ safety.

Questions: Which do you think should be the priority? What are ways to resolve the two?