

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 28, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

On behalf of our constituents and countless communities nationwide, we urge you to declare a national Public Health Emergency (PHE) on gun violence. A PHE declaration would trigger an immediate and systematic response, including the deployment of necessary resources to fully address this nation's gun violence crisis.

Gun violence is currently the leading cause of premature death in the United States.¹ The U.S. represents about 4% of the world's population, but approximately 35% of global firearm suicides, making Americans 25 times more likely to be killed by gun violence than people in other high-income countries.² Oakland, California alone finished 2021 with its deadliest year in more than a decade, with over 130 homicides.³

We also know that gun violence disproportionately harms communities of color. African American men make up about 52% of all gun homicides despite comprising less than 7% of the U.S. population.⁴ In Oakland, Black residents represent more than half of the city's homicides and only a quarter of the city's population. Additionally, three out of four residents killed in Oakland are Black.⁵ The equitable deployment of Federal resources, in collaboration with State and local personnel, resources, and infrastructure, will help ensure that the safety of all of our communities is prioritized.

¹ Factsheet: Gun Violence is a Public Health Crisis, American Public Health Association, from https://www.apha.org/-/media/Files/PDF/factsheets/200221_Gun_Violence_Fact_Sheet.ashx

² Statistics. Giffords. (2022, October 6). Retrieved October 19, 2022, from <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-violence-statistics/>

³ Her daughter was killed and now this mom is calling on Oakland to step up and help. Westervelt, E. (2021, December 6). NPR. Retrieved October 19, 2022, from <https://www.npr.org/2021/12/06/1060986954/homicides-gun-violence-oakland-california>

⁴ Ibid, Factsheet: Gun Violence is a Public Health Crisis, American Public Health Association

⁵ <https://www.bradyunited.org/program/combating-crime-guns/local-programs/oakland-crime-guns>

We ask that you choose to end the traumatic cycle of violence through the following strategies:

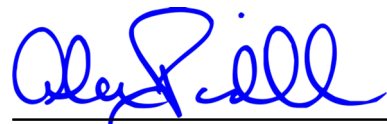
- Declare a national PHE on gun violence and immediately coordinate Federal (HHS/CDC/OMH, HUD, DOJ) with local strategies and resources to implement rapid response efforts.
- Ensure the strategy is developed through a racial equity lens towards affected communities, and their respective community and faith-based organizations.
- Maintain frequent communication, while utilizing culturally and linguistically responsive resources to ensure equity.
- Ensure that effective community-based programs that reduce violence can use Medicaid to fund violence prevention through the issuance of 1135 and 1115 Medicaid waivers.
- Provide enhanced Federal Medical Assistance Percentages (FMAPs) for culturally relevant violence prevention professionals engaged in this work.
- Increase mental health and telehealth services to address the impact of trauma associated with gun violence.
- Deploy, at minimum, 1,000 Violence Prevention Professionals in key cities with high numbers and rates of gun violence, such as Oakland, California.
- Integrate and expand the White House Community Violence Intervention (CVI) Collaborative plan including other sustainable funding mechanisms and support.
- Review local, State and Federal policies on violence prevention with a race-equity lens, develop guidance on best practices, and provide technical assistance and other support to community-based organizations.

The Public Health Emergency Declaration on Gun Violence will fundamentally reframe how people perceive gun violence prevention efforts and recommit this nation to ending gun violence. When faced with a national public health crisis, the federal government marshals its resources to protect Americans, and gun violence should not be an exception. Thank you for your leadership, and we look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Alex Padilla
United States Senator