



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Bill Perkins

Letter to President Barack Obama: Gun Violence in Urban Communities

BILL PERKINS

| ISSUE: **CRIME, SOCIAL SERVICES**

July 9, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of The United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to enlist your leadership on a matter of grave concern that is pervasive in urban communities: gun violence among our youth. It is time for action. Your Administration is poised to focus on this issue, explore options, and devise and apply a multifaceted strategy that will finally address this national, chronic, public health problem. Please form a Presidential Task Force to study how to eliminate gun violence in urban America.

A recent study by the New York Times found that in our city alone, from 2003 to the present, we average 540 homicides per year. Of those victims, sixty-one percent are African-American

and twenty-seven percent are Latino. They comprise a tragic eighty-eight percent of all homicide victims, numbers that hold steady for the race/ethnicity of the perpetrators. Eighty three percent of victims are male, as are ninety-two percent of the perpetrators. A firearm is used seventy percent of the time. Inner city gun violence persists despite otherwise declining crime.

If New York City is emblematic of the problem, then urban minority males live in veritable warzones. No statistic is more telling than the fact that during this period the number of homicides in our one city, thirty-four hundred and ten, nearly matches the exact number of American casualties, thirty-four hundred and sixty-three for the entire Iraq war during the exact time. Put another way, we have, within the confines of new York City, during this brief period, lost hundreds more people to homicide than were lost on September 11th. Multiply that fact to cities across America and you will see the potential scale of the epidemic.

Yet the problem is not insurmountable. As your own election proves, anything is possible when the human imagination gets properly inspired. America remains a great nation in need of smart, compassionate leadership such as you have prioritized. We urge you to make the eradication of urban gun violence your Administration's next great focus.

Change is possible. Boston's "Operation Ceasefire" is one example of a multi-faceted program that utilized a grass roots approach and made some notable headway against the problem—until federal budget cuts combined with other factors to undo much of the progress. We recommend that the Administration assign a task force to study this and other programs and options for reducing inner city gun crime, then apply the best policy recommendations. This is a complex social problem that extends throughout our culture. It will likely require multi-faceted, coordinated solutions such as only the federal government can manage.

We must unite and stand for our at-risk youth. We must do it to protect our future leaders and good citizens, and to honor the generations of fallen youth whose blood cries from the ground. Let it not be that our inaction today sacrifices another generation of talent and human spirit to the senselessness of urban gun violence. We simply have too much to lose. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Senator Bill Perkins

New York State 30th Senatorial District

Senator Eric Adams

New York State 20th Senatorial District