



Written Testimony of Rebecca G. Fischer

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**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Public Protection
February 13, 2025**

Thank you, Senate Finance Chair Krueger, Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chair Pretlow, and the New York State Legislature for the opportunity to submit written testimony for today’s Joint Legislative FY26 Budget Hearing on Public Protection (February 13, 2025).

My name is Rebecca Fischer and I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers Against Gun Violence (NYAGV). NYAGV is a statewide non-profit organization and for over 30 years, we have been advocating for sensible gun violence prevention policies and programs at the state, local, and federal levels. NYAGV has been instrumental in the state’s passage of background checks and extreme risk protection order laws, our state gun industry liability law and ghost-gun prohibitions, and numerous other life-saving policies and initiatives. We also run our own gun violence education and victim support program in New York City public schools.

On behalf of NYAGV, I submit this testimony today to urge the legislature to enact and fund the New York State Office of Gun Violence Prevention (NYS-OGVP or Office) Act (S.1289/A.2084) at a minimum of \$15 million in the State’s FY26 Budget. The FY26 Executive Budget, as currently proposed, does not include or reference the NYS-OGVP or allocate funding to the Office’s annual budget. Though the NYS-OGVP has received budget funding since its inception (Executive Order 2011 of 2021), it has been insufficiently funded at a maximum of \$3 million per year. Moreover, at least \$2.5 million of each annual allocation has been marked exclusively for grant distribution and not for personnel or operations of the NYS-OGVP.

The need for an adequately funded and codified New York State Office of Gun Prevention is greater now than ever. Gun violence is an ongoing public health crisis in the state of New York. The rate of shooting incidents remains above pre-Covid levels and gun violence is now the leading cause of death for New York’s children. Given the Trump Administration’s

elimination of the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention and promise to dismantle and defund national gun safety efforts, a centralized state OGVP is essential to implementing a multi-prong public health approach to reducing gun violence.

I. Gun Violence is a Public Health Crisis in New York State.

Despite New York's relatively strong state and local gun safety laws, gun violence is a public health epidemic in New York due largely to the national gun trafficking crisis.^{1,2} Crime guns originating from weak-gun-law states continue to be trafficked across New York, plaguing our states most under resourced and impoverished communities. In fact, over 70 percent of firearms used in fatal and non-fatal shooting incidents are from states along the I-95 iron pipeline like Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia - all of which have much much looser gun laws than New York.³

In 2020, after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, gun sales and illegal trafficking surged. Covid-19 also caused unemployment and poverty to spike and deepened other systemic inequities in the poorest sections of our State's cities.⁴ These factors combined with easy access to guns caused rates of gun violence to rapidly increase in New York State, disproportionately impacting Black and Brown New Yorkers. Statewide in 2020 there was a 75% increase in shootings and an 82% increase in gun homicides impacting all of our cities from Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse, through Troy and Albany and down to New York City.⁵ Notably, the surging rates of gun violence in 2020 and 2021 were not unique to New York State. From Detroit

¹ "Gun Violence: The Impact on Public Health," National Institute for Health Care Management, Updated July 12, 2022. <https://nihcm.org/publications/gun-violence-the-impact-on-public-health>. Accessed April 15, 2023.

² "The Blueprint to End Gun Violence," City Of New York, January 24, 2022. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2022/the-blueprint-to-end-gun-violence.pdf>. Accessed April 15, 2023.

³ "Five Things to Know about Crime Guns, Gun Trafficking, and Background Checks," Everytown Research and Policy / Everytown Gun Safety Support Fund, Updated October 10, 2022. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/five-things-to-know-about-crime-guns/>. Accessed April 15, 2023.

⁴ Chapman, Ben, "New York City's Shooting Surge Hit Black and Brown Communities Hardest," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 20, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-citys-shooting-surge-hit-black-and-hispanic-communities-hardest-11609074001>. Accessed April 15, 2023.

⁵ From 2019 to 2020, there was a 97% increase in New York City. Shootings rose 110% in Albany, 97 percent in Buffalo, 74% in Syracuse and 69% in Rochester. <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/politics/2021/02/11/gun-violence-up-in-major-cities-across-ny>; See also Murder Accountability Project. (2019). New York state homicide clearance rate 2010-2019: Uniform Crime Reports. <http://www.murderdata.org/p/blog-page.html>; Plants, R. (2020, December 31). Erie County D.A. assesses very violent 2020 in Buffalo; <https://www.wgrz.com/article/news/crime/erie-county-district-attorney-assesses-very-violent-2020-in-buffalo/71-4df1c2e9-5654-4e97-842f-8d2a64330f75>; RPD confirms 51 homicides in 2020, highest in past 10 years. Rochester First. <https://www.rochesterfirst.com/crime/rpd-confirms-51-homicides-in-2020-highest-in-past-10-years/>

to New Orleans to Los Angeles, shooting incidents substantially increased at comparable rates in cities across the country.⁶

By 2022, as the nation began to slowly recover economically and New Yorkers returned to work, gun violence rates also began to decline.⁷ For 2024, New York City, for example, recorded 899 shooting incidents, a 7.7% drop from 2023.⁸ Despite the decline, however, gun violence incidents remain above pre-Covid levels and continue to have a devastating impact on Black and Brown children. In fact, there has been a rising toll of gun violence on young people under 18 over the past six years and is now the leading cause of premature death for NY's children.⁹

As we are forced to reckon with this country's patchwork of inconsistent and weak firearm regulation, research has repeatedly shown that a complex system of solutions is required to tackle the gun violence crisis.¹⁰ We know, for example, that cities that have had the most success driving down gun violence rates have focused on (1) addressing conflicts and violence in neighborhoods where communities are at higher risk of being victimized by violence; (2) enforcement of violent gun crimes and the highest drivers of trafficking; (3) the expansion of grassroots community programs and community-based nonprofits; (4) police deployment at hot spots of crime and; (5) a concentrated focus on crisis intervention for individuals with a history of violence and gun carrying.¹¹ Cities are adopting a comprehensive multi-agency, multipronged public health approach to violence prevention, engaging the police department, federal partners, public health officials, community and hospital violence interruption partners and others.¹²

Notably, many of the cities and states, including New York, that have experienced the largest declines in gun violence since 2020 were also able to successfully leverage federal funds from the American Rescue Plan and the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act to expand community-led violence intervention programs.¹³ The White House OGVP has now been dismantled and these sources of federal funding will expire at the end of 2025. The Trump Administration has made it clear that they are far more committed to cutting government funding for localities, particularly New York, than expanding assistance and eliminating gun safety efforts and initiatives.

⁶ [Analysis of Firearm Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the US - PMC](#)

⁷ [Vital City | The Recovery From COVID-19 Pandemic Gun Violence](#); see also [Data shows 'major progress' in reducing gun violence in N.Y.](#); [Early 2024 Data Show Promising Signs of Another Historic Decline in Gun Violence - Center for American Progress](#)

⁸ [Vital City | Vital Signs: State of the City on Crime 2024](#)

⁹ *149 Shot, 16 Dead: Gunfire Rising Toll on New York City's Youngest*, (December 27, 2022)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/27/nyregion/new-york-teen-shootings.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShar>

¹⁰ [Vital City | The Recovery From COVID-19 Pandemic Gun Violence](#)

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

II. New York State Needs a Strong, Permanent Office of Gun Violence Prevention.

Now more than ever, New York State needs an expanded and permanent NYS-OGVP to implement short and long-term strategies that comprehensively prevent gun violence and reduce crime. A centralized infrastructure and hub at the state level is required to coordinate government agencies and stakeholders while also ensuring that the public is educated about our strong laws and programs and that they are implemented and enforced accordingly.

1. Coordinate with state, local, and federal government agencies, stakeholders, and partners on gun safety efforts.

To coordinate a statewide response to gun violence, the NYS-OGVP needs personnel capacity to build effective relationships and systems with numerous agencies and stakeholders. NYS-OGVP was recently moved to the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services which oversees and funds all of the states' community-based intervention programs (SNUG and GIVE) and works with state and local law enforcement partners on crime prevention, enforcement, and community re-entry. However, though DCJS is the largest agency to focus on gun violence, it is only one of a very long list of state agencies that are responsible for initiatives and funding related to preventing and reducing gun violence and crime including but not limited to the State's Department of Health, Department of Education, Office of Victim Services, Office of Domestic Violence, and many others. And, a State OGVP should not only be communicating and coordinating with state government agencies, as our local governments are closest to the violence happening at the community-level. An effective State OGVP needs to coordinate with state, local, and federal agencies, district attorneys and police departments, hospitals and community-centered initiatives, and many others.

2. Help implement state gun laws and programs including public education campaigns.

The NYS-OGVP needs increased funding and capacity to help the state implement our strong gun laws and programs in coordination with police, prosecutors, judges, and licensing authorities. If the office has proper staffing, they will be able to help coordinate technical assistance for localities and be a hub for statewide gun violence data to track performance and create accountability.¹⁴ The Office would also have more capacity and support to develop robust public education and training programs about our laws, including extreme risk protection orders and safe firearm storage. Though our state has strong laws on the books, they are often not known or utilized for prevention. For instance, in the case of the Buffalo Tops Supermarket

¹⁴ [Landscape-Analysis-of-State-OGVP-July-2024.pdf](#)

shooting there were multiple points of contact that knew that the shooter had access to firearms and that he was in crisis but all failed to file an extreme risk protection order in civil court. Had the family, household members, law enforcement, and healthcare providers been better educated and trained on the ERPO procedure, the mass shooting in Buffalo could have potentially been prevented.

3. Obtain and distribute funding for gun violence prevention.

The NYS-OGVP needs expanded personnel capacity to obtain and distribute government grant funding and also coordinate and communicate with the network of other agencies that allocate gun violence prevention relevant funding. For FY23 and FY24, the NYS OGVP received \$2.5 million to distribute to community partners but the request for proposal process has been delayed, justifiably. Expanded internal infrastructure is required to oversee and execute this process more quickly. The Office needs to increase staffing and ensure that there is a dedicated unit to focus on distribution and coordination or much-needed funds will remain unavailable to communities impacted by gun violence.

Moreover, during President Biden's term, federal agencies also granted states, including New York State, hundreds of millions of dollars to support crisis intervention and community violence interventions, including through the Community Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative (CVIPI) and the Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (SCIP). Given that federal funding is likely to be cut or eliminated under President Trump, we need a stronger NYS-OGVP to identify and compete for limited federal grants and to ensure that the contracting process is completed efficiently.

4. Improve quality of and access to statewide gun violence data.

Gun violence prevention efforts have been stunted and delayed by insufficient and unreliable data and research. The NYS-OGVP needs the capacity to improve quality of and access to critical data on gun violence, gun sales, trafficking, and violent crime. If appropriately funded, the NYS-OGVP will be able to hire a full-time research and evaluation unit with a dedicated data analyst. The unit will collaborate with the department of health, center for environmental health bureau of occupational health and injury prevention and other agencies managing public health data and safety. The OGVP will be able to build a centralized data dashboard and more effectively partner with agencies to integrate and strengthen data collection and support ongoing data-informed surveillance.

5. Enhance hospital capacity for victims of gun violence.

A strong, sufficiently funded NYS-OGVP will be able to work with state and local hospitals and healthcare providers to enhance hospital capacity for victims of gun violence by (1) standardizing evidence-based, trauma-informed hospital violence intervention programs (HVIPS); and (2) providing capacity building and technical assistance to community-based organizations, hospitals, and violence intervention professionals.

III. The NYS-Office of Gun Violence Prevention must be codified by statute.

For ongoing, long-term success tackling the gun violence crisis, the NYS-OGVP should be codified and enacted into law with reliable budget funding on an annual basis. The current NYS-OGVP was created through the Governor's executive action and could be eliminated altogether, just as the White House's Office was eliminated, if state elections were to bring a new administration. A temporary office that is dependent on the political climate year-after-year will be hampered by uncertainty will make it much more challenging to develop a set of reliable and consistent metrics to measure longer term success and impact.

In conclusion, we urge the New York State Legislature to pass and fund the New York State Office of Gun Violence Prevention (NYS-OGVP) Act at a minimum of \$15 million in the State's FY26 Budget. A centralized NYS Office of Gun Violence Prevention is essential to implementing a multi-prong public health approach as the Office requires expanded capacity and leadership to effectively drive down gun violence rates and save New Yorkers' lives.

On behalf of New Yorkers Against Gun Violence, thank you for considering my written testimony today.