

# massachusetts coalition to prevent gun violence

Dear Chairs Brownsberger and Hunt and members of the Commission,

I'm Alejandra Rivera, Policy Manager at the Massachusetts Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence. We are a statewide umbrella organization of over 120 member groups working to prevent gun violence through evidence-based policy and community partnerships. While we know that advocating for laws that regulate firearms is critical, we also know we cannot fully address gun violence without targeting its root causes — including poverty, lack of opportunity, trauma, and insufficient investment in community-based solutions.

Before joining the Coalition, I worked in the nonprofit and public health sectors, creating programs and policies aimed at building safe, healthy environments for children, youth, and families. That lens informs my work: preventing gun violence is not just about responding to incidents after they happen — it is about creating conditions where young people and communities can thrive, and harm is prevented before it occurs.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony, and for the Commission's continued work to keep the Commonwealth safe. I am writing to highlight the fundamental connection between juvenile justice reform and gun violence prevention.

I will defer to other testifying stakeholders to address the specifics of Department of Correction programming, facilities, and other matters within the Commission's charge. My focus is instead on the evidence regarding what most effectively improves public safety for youth and communities, and the implications of that evidence for how we allocate resources.

We know that punitive responses for youth do not reduce gun violence.

When we talk about children and teens, the research shows that developmentally, young people are not small adults — and systems that treat them as such do not improve community safety. With that in mind, it is imperative that we promote policies and practices that meet the specific needs of youth who are involved with the justice system. Some statistics that highlight that critical need are reflected in the national data:

- Youth prosecuted in the adult system are **34% more likely to be rearrested for violent offenses** than youth kept in the juvenile system ([CDC](#)).
- Incarcerating youth increases the likelihood of adult incarceration by **70%** ([Justice Policy Institute: The Dangers of Detention](#))

At the Coalition, we believe that meaningfully reducing gun violence requires investing in youth — all youth — so they have the resources and stability to be safe and well. A criminal record too often becomes a long-term barrier to basic needs such as housing, employment, and education, pushing young people further from the supports that protect against gun violence.

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The data make this clear – expanding incarceration capacity is not a sound public safety investment.

The strongest public safety returns on investment come from supports *outside* the facility.

Nationwide, interventions that address instability, provide support, and create opportunities show measurable reductions in recidivism and future violence.

Here in Massachusetts, organizations like ROCA, UTEC, More Than Words, and others offer at-risk and justice-involved youth mentorship, behavioral health support, education, and employment opportunities. According to ROCA's 2025 report, after three years in the program, previously incarcerated young men had a 30% lower recidivism rate than their peers ([ROCA 2025 report](#)).

These programs demonstrate what decades of research on adolescent development and public health tell us: youth are far less likely to engage in violence when they are supported, connected to caring adults, and given real opportunities to succeed.

To align with this evidence, juvenile justice reform in Massachusetts must prioritize support over punishment, especially for those in the critical 18–20-year-old age range. Supporting policy proposals like the Raise the Age bill would do exactly that. We need more investment in interventions that work, reduce recidivism, and ultimately prevent gun violence. Because we know that when a young person is supported and given more opportunities to thrive, they are far less likely to pick up a gun.

In conclusion, the Commission's work is fundamentally about determining where the Commonwealth's resources can most effectively support public safety. **The evidence is clear: harsher punishment does not reduce gun violence**, and expanding incarceration capacity will not make communities safer.

With this framework in mind, I respectfully urge the Commission to prioritize resources in two key areas. First, the Commonwealth should invest in community-based, evidence-backed youth programs rather than expanding correctional capacity. Community violence intervention (CVI) programs and other community-based reentry supports have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing recidivism and promoting long-term stability, while additional beds or facility expansion have not been shown to produce measurable improvements in public safety. I encourage the Commission to explore opportunities to strengthen and expand support for community organizations that are already achieving positive outcomes – both in preventing gun violence and in supporting individuals returning to their communities.

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Second, I recommend strengthening and expanding community-integrated reentry services that create continuity between facilities and the community. These approaches reduce reincarceration, support successful reintegration, and help ensure that public investments are guided by evidence about what most effectively promotes safety and well-being across our communities.

Thank you for your time and for your thoughtful consideration of these recommendations as you work to keep Massachusetts safe from gun violence.

Sincerely,

Alejandra Rivera, MPH  
Policy Manager  
Massachusetts Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence