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Democratic Whip



Senate of Pennsylvania

June 24, 2019

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The Honorable Tom Wolf
Governor of Pennsylvania
225 Capitol Building
Via Hand Delivery

Dear Governor Wolf,

Thank you for your continued strong leadership on issues which affect the everyday lives, liberty, and freedom of all Pennsylvanians. We write to you today as a caucus to request that you issue a disaster declaration addressing the gun violence epidemic ravaging Pennsylvania's communities. We believe it is necessary to raise the public's awareness of the massive loss of human life and the suffering inflicted on affected family, friends and neighbors where this tragedy is unfolding daily. Just as you have signed six disaster declarations to provide every tool at the Commonwealth's disposal to combat the opioid epidemic, the death toll and impact from illegal guns should merit immediate and coordinated attention.

As of Friday, there have been 154 homicides in Philadelphia, up thirteen-percent since this time last year – a year which saw a 10-year high of 349 homicides. An average of 1,400 Pennsylvanians are killed by guns each year. Pennsylvania lost two-and-half more citizens to gun crime between 2005 and 2014 than American soldiers killed in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Of the estimated twenty veterans who die by suicide each day, 70 percent are due to guns. While Philadelphia bears a particularly heavy burden driven by disproportionate levels of chronic poverty, gun deaths occur in communities throughout the Commonwealth - a person is murdered with a gun every 17 hours in Pennsylvania. Last week, another ten people were injured in a shooting outside of a nightclub in Allentown.

Our caucus has put forward and supported many legislative measures to address this epidemic, be it through creating and funding the Joint Local State Firearm Task Force, establishing the Safe Schools and Community Anti-Violence grant programs, enhancing behavioral and mental health programs. We've led the way on extreme risk protection orders and dozens of other legislative proposals to end gun violence, all with your support.

In any other context, this loss of life would draw public outcry from every corner of the commonwealth. A comprehensive and coordinated approach is necessary to address this health and public safety issue in our communities.

Specifically, a disaster declaration could do the following:

- Establish a task force led by the Department of Health to create and implement a public health framework for addressing gun violence
- Establish a command center in the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency to coordinate state and local law enforcement response
- Enhance the Joint-Local State Firearm Taskforce through additional personnel and funding to take illegal guns off the street
- Expand information gathering and sharing between all levels of law enforcement and community groups
- Increase law enforcement presence, both local and state, in targeted areas where gun violence is most prevalent
- Expedite and expand grants and other funding sources for community groups and nonprofit associations with a proven record of violence reduction and prevention
- Provide additional state resources for behavioral and mental health
- Bringing to bear the significant wealth of knowledge and experience in the Departments of Health and Human Services to provide de-escalation and de-confliction training throughout the community
- Require the Pennsylvania Department of Education provide training and professional development on trauma-informed education

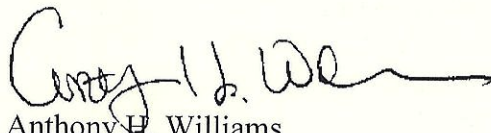
This declaration includes both short- and long-term solutions to address the immediate crisis as well as the soul crushing, deep, multi-generational poverty and sense of hopelessness that feeds and escalates this public health crisis. The human centered solutions require working tirelessly to create pathways to real careers in these communities while raising the minimum wage. It also requires expansion and equitable distribution of education funding to educate all of our children. Finally, we must strengthen the social safety net that gives children an opportunity to escape the unfortunate social determinants prescribed at birth. Our caucus has repeatedly supported measures which improve the lives of our neediest citizens while providing pathways out of soul crushing poverty.

We know that you share our concerns and agree that as leaders of this Commonwealth we can no longer stand idle while citizens die from preventable violence. Thank you for your prompt attention to this crisis.

Sincerely,



Jay Costa
State Senator – 43rd District
Democratic Leader



Anthony H. Williams
State Senator – 8th District
Democratic Whip

Vincent Hughes
State Senator – 7th District
Democratic Appropriations Chair

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Andrew Dinniman
State Senator – 19th District

Maria Collett
State Senator – 12th District

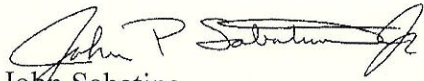
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State Senator – 4th District

Lindsey Williams
State Senator – 38th District

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Sharif Street
State Senator – 3rd District

Tim Kearney
State Senator – 26th District



John Sabatina
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Daylin Leach
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Steve Santarsiero
State Senator – 10th District