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**Written Testimony Supporting the Language and Concept of House Bill
5397, An Act Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis and
Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention and Advisory Council
on Gun Violence Prevention**

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Ranking Members Hwang, Somers, and Petit, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am submitting written testimony supporting the language and concept of House Bill 5397, An Act Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention and Advisory Council on Gun Violence Prevention.

The ACLU-CT is an organization dedicated to ending mass incarceration, eliminating racial disparities in the criminal legal system, and reducing harms to justice-impacted people. The ACLU-CT believes that police violence cannot be effectively addressed without reducing the role, responsibilities, and presence of police. This means, at minimum, diverting funds from police to instead build safe and healthy communities. Reallocating funds away from the police is a long-term strategy to reimagine how communities can keep themselves safe, but the immediate work requires building infrastructures to create alternatives to policing and to address root causes to obviate the need for police at all. Gun violence is a public health issue: it is the leading cause of premature death in the country, as it kills approximately 38,000 people and causes nearly 85,000 injuries per year.¹

¹ See, e.g., *Gun Violence*, AM. PUB. HEALTH ASS'N (last accessed Mar. 28, 2022), available at <https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/gun-violence>.

Community-based programming that prevents or interrupts violence without police intervention is one incredibly important component of building safe communities, addressing and treating root causes of violence, and eventually moving away from reliance on police. Rather than funnel more unneeded money into police departments, House Bill 5397 would house the new Office of Gun Violence Prevention within the Department of Public Health with the aim of studying gun violence and using its findings to implement evidence-informed, community-based programs and strategies to reduce gun violence. We commend the language and concept of House Bill 5397 for its efforts to ensure that its grants will prioritize organizations that conduct their work in communities with the highest occurrences of gun violence and gun violence victimization, and its charge to ensure equity in the distribution process. This bill also vitally encourages the use of disaggregated data by race and ethnicity to pinpoint the disproportionate barriers to safety from gun violence that different groups of people experience. The Advisory Council on Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention is also well-structured to ensure representation of persons impacted by gun violence, with a specific requirement that communities of color are represented.

By creating a new framework for how we study and address gun violence in the state of Connecticut, House Bill 5397 supports new models of community safety that rely less on policing and more on evidence-based intervention programs. We support the community-based preventive models proposed by this bill. We support the concept and the language of House Bill 5397 and fundamentally believe that gun violence is a public health issue, and urge this Committee to do the same.