



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AND MILITARY AFFAIRS
Tuesday, February 7, 2023**

SB 863, An Act Concerning Veterans And Gun Violence Prevention

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **SB 863, An Act Concerning Veterans And Gun Violence Prevention**. CHA supports the bill.

Connecticut hospitals continue to meet the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and are now facing new challenges of treating sicker patients than they saw before the pandemic, with a dedicated but smaller workforce who are exemplary but exhausted. They are also experiencing significant financial hardships brought on by record inflation. Through it all, hospitals have been steadfast, providing high-quality care for everyone who walks through their doors, regardless of ability to pay.

Connecticut hospitals have been collaborating with community partners, legislators, and other stakeholders for years to advance trauma-informed case management services to victims of violence, with the common goals of starting the healing process, supporting victims and their families, and preventing further violence. Hospital-based initiatives in Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport have focused on the needs of those who have suffered physical assault injuries (e.g., gunshots, stabbings, and blunt trauma) and sexual assault, as well as victims of human trafficking. These efforts and related work in other states have led to the establishment of hospital violence intervention programs (HVIPs) in our state, which offer the services of violence prevention professionals (VPPs).

VPPs often make an initial connection with victims while they are still in the hospital. They are available to victims and their families to coordinate victim assistance services under the Victims of Crime Act, to connect victims with mental health services, including brief trauma-focused therapy, to coordinate post-discharge medical follow-up for the treatment of injuries, to connect victims with opportunities for employment and educational advancement, and to coordinate referrals to community-based services for food, clothing, and legal advocacy. VPPs also focus on mitigating the risk of retribution in the hours and days after an incident.

State laws enacted in 2021 require state agency approval of programs to train and certify VPPs and coverage of these services under the Medicaid program.¹ In 2022, the General Assembly required the Department of Public Health (DPH) to develop a community gun violence intervention and prevention program and established a 23-member Commission on Community Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention to advise the DPH commissioner on developing programs and strategies to reduce gun violence.² The Commission includes members representing CHA, Hartford Hospital, Saint Francis Hospital, and Yale New Haven Hospital.

These actions are enabling our state to implement a unified, consistent, and sustainable statewide approach for hospitals, agencies, and community-based violence intervention programs to deliver targeted case management services to victims of violence and their families.

SB 863 would require the state to establish a gun violence prevention program in which municipalities would employ veterans to (1) provide mentorship to at-risk youths who are recruited through HVIPs, and (2) offer instructions to gun owners on firearms safety. We endorse the recruitment of veterans for both of these activities, given their demonstrated commitment to mission-based and group-based public service, and their familiarity with gun safety principles and practices, such as safe storage.

As with similar initiatives in other states, the mentorship component contemplated by this program would rely on HVIPs to target youths who have already been introduced to gun violence. This component would offer such young people a constructive use of after-school time, a consistent and positive human connection with a veteran, and reduce the risk of the young person becoming involved with peers who may be inclined to substance use or violent acts.

We believe that HVIPs are the right vehicle to enable implementation of such an innovative evidence-based and community centered program. For these reasons, CHA supports **SB 863**.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.

¹ Senate Bill No. 1 (PA 21-35) An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access To Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care In Response To the Pandemic and House Bill No. 5677 (PA 21-36) An Act Concerning The Availability Of Community Violence Prevention Services Under Medicaid.

² Sections 80 and 81 of House Bill No. 5506 (PA 22-118), An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2023, Concerning Provisions Related To Revenue, School Construction And Other Items To Implement The State Budget And Authorizing And Adjusting Bonds Of The State.