

August 28, 2023

VIA MAIL AND EMAIL

Mayor Michelle Wu
1 City Hall Square, Suite 500
Boston, MA 02201-2013

Re: Gun Violence in Boston

Dear Mayor Wu:

On behalf of our client communities, Lawyers For Civil Rights (“LCR”) urges you and the Boston Police Department (“BPD”) to redouble community trust-building efforts to stem the tide of gun violence in the City. To effectively combat shootings, BPD must earn the faith of Boston residents—especially the communities of color disproportionately harmed by gun violence.

As you are aware, Boston has been rocked by a spate of recent gun violence. On Saturday, a nearby shooting cut short the Caribbean cultural festival in Dorchester.¹ This was not an isolated incident. Dorchester residents were subjected to more firearm-related violence throughout the day.² And, in July, a twelve-year-old boy was tragically shot and killed in Mattapan before an eruption of violence led to two more Boston shooting deaths just a few weeks later.³

The consequences of this bloodshed are impossible to overstate. Young people are dying in unacceptable numbers, families are being destroyed, and residents are being forced to live in fear. That’s why it’s more important than ever for elected officials and law enforcement personnel to do all they can to build trust between police and the people they serve, particularly the communities of color that are disproportionately harmed by gun violence.⁴

Boston can work toward that goal in several different ways. As an initial matter, BPD must take more affirmative steps to diversify its ranks. Just last year, LCR issued distressing findings

¹ John Hilliard & Spencer Buell, *Eight people shot, one seriously hurt, during J’ouvert fete Saturday morning in Dorchester*, BOS. GLOBE (Aug. 26, 2023), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/08/26/metro/seven-people-shot-during-jouvert-celebration-saturday-morning-dorchester-police-say/>.

² *Day of violence along stretch of Blue Hill Avenue includes gun battle that injured eight near Jouvert parade*, DORCHESTER REPORTER (Aug. 26, 2023), <https://www.dotnews.com/2023/seven-shot-talbot-avenue-jouvert-parade-passes-nearby-police-say-two>.

³ Veronica Haynes, *22-year-old man charged in deadly shooting of 12-year-old boy in Boston*, WCVB.COM (July 13, 2023), <https://www.wcvb.com/article/person-shot-in-bostons-mattapan-neighborhood/44535681>; Katrina Kincade, *2 dead after violent night of shootings, stabbings in Boston*, WBZ NEWS (July 31, 2023), <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/boston-police-shootings-stabbings-roxbury-dorchester-july-30/>.

⁴ Brandon Truitt, *Massachusetts has fewest gun deaths, but large disparity between white and Black victims*, CBS NEWS BOS. (May 9, 2023), <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/massachusetts-has-fewest-gun-deaths-but-large-disparity-between-white-and-black-victims/>.

regarding BPD's long-term failure to address its overwhelmingly white workforce.⁵ As Boston continues to diversify, so must its uniformed personnel. When law enforcement changes to reflect the community it serves, community trust and confidence soars. This aids in both the investigation and prevention of gun violence. Relatedly, BPD must continue to improve its transparency and accountability. BPD only recently agreed to address its backlog of public records requests in response to a lawsuit from LCR,⁶ and it has more disciplinary reports than nearly every other local department per the Commonwealth's new database.⁷ Increased openness and accountability are critical for building trust. BPD has a long way to go on both.

The City of Boston must also invest in its communities of color. Ensuring that everyone has access to equal educational opportunity, job training programs, and other resources necessary to have true economic opportunity goes hand-in-hand with reducing violence.

It's clear that BPD must do more to foster the trust and respect of the City's diverse communities. To ensure that Boston prioritizes this effort going forward—and that it can meaningfully respond to the growing epidemic of gun violence—LCR requests a meeting with your office and representatives of BPD at your earliest convenience.

We look forward to hearing from you. To schedule a meeting, please email Jacob Love at jlove@lawyersforcivilrights.org or Tasheena Davis at tdavis@lawyersforcivilrights.org.

Sincerely,

/s/

Jacob M. Love, Staff Attorney
Tasheena M. Davis, Staff Attorney
Lawyers for Civil Rights

CC: Police Commissioner Michael Cox

⁵ See *Race/Gender Gaps in Boston's Municipal Workforce*, available at <http://lawyersforcivilrights.org/our-impact/police-accountability/major-diversity-gaps-along-racial-and-gender-lines-in-bostons-municipal-workforce/>.

⁶ Ivy Scott *Boston police agree to eliminate public records backlog within 6 months, settling lawsuit*, BOS. GLOBE (Aug. 24, 2023), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/08/24/metro/boston-police-public-records-settlement/>.

⁷ Deborah Becker & Ally Jarmanning, *Mass. police misconduct database is released, but excludes many complaints*, WBUR.ORG (Aug. 22, 2023), <https://www.wbur.org/news/2023/08/22/mass-police-misconduct-database-post-complaints>.