

August 28, 2023

Mayor Domenic J. Sarno  
36 Court Street  
Springfield, MA 01103

**Re: Gun Violence in Springfield**

Dear Mayor Sarno:

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

As you are aware, Springfield has been rocked by a spate of recent gun violence. Two people were killed, and several children were hurt, in a horrifying double homicide on August 14th.<sup>1</sup> And this was not an isolated incident. Springfield families haven’t had more than a moment’s respite the whole Summer, with twenty-one shootings taking place between June and August.<sup>2</sup> The City has already tied a 27-year record for homicides.<sup>3</sup>

The consequences of this bloodshed are impossible to overstate. Young people are dying in droves,<sup>4</sup> families are being destroyed, and City 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 disproportionately harmed by gun violence.<sup>5</sup>

SPD can work toward that goal in several different ways. As an initial matter, it must take more affirmative steps to diversify its ranks. As Massachusetts 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, SPD must continue to improve its transparency and accountability. SPD only recently entered into a consent decree with the Justice Department following a scathing

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<sup>1</sup> Kristina D’Amours & Duncan MacLean, *Springfield community shaken after double homicide shooting*, WWLP.COM (Aug. 14, 2023), <https://www.wwlp.com/news/local-news/hampden-county/springfield-community-shaken-after-double-homicide-shooting/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> See Glenn Kittle & Ryan Towbridge, *Springfield leaders call for action following uptick in gun violence*, WESTERN MASS. NEWS (Aug. 14, 2023), <https://www.westernmassnews.com/2023/08/14/live-130-springfield-officials-meet-address-recent-gun-violence/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> 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/>.

federal report on SPD's practices,<sup>6</sup> and SPD has more disciplinary reports than any other local police department per the Commonwealth's police discipline database.<sup>7</sup> The latter reflects widespread distrust of police in the City. Increased openness and accountability are critical for building trust. SPD has a long way to go on both.

The City of Springfield 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. Another way to curb gun violence is to invest in the City's youth. Providing better youth programming and support will interrupt the path to criminal activity and bring about positive change.

It's clear that SPD must do more to foster the trust and respect of the diverse communities it serves. To ensure that Springfield 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 SPD at your earliest convenience.

We look forward to hearing from you and collaborating on this pressing issue. To schedule a meeting, please email Jacob Love at [jlove@lawyersforcivilrights.org](mailto:jlove@lawyersforcivilrights.org).

Sincerely,

/s/

Jacob M. Love, Esq.  
Staff Attorney  
Lawyers for Civil Rights

CC: Police Superintendent Cheryl Clapprod

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<sup>6</sup> Karen Brown, *Justice Department and Springfield officials announce police department consent decree*, WBUR (April 14, 2022), <https://www.wbur.org/news/2022/04/14/justice-department-springfield-police-consent-decree>.

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