

August 28, 2023

**VIA MAIL AND EMAIL**

Mayor Joseph Petty  
455 Main Street, Room 305  
Worcester, MA 01608

**Re: Gun Violence in Worcester**

Dear Mayor Petty:

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

As you are aware, Worcester has been rocked by a spate of recent gun violence. On Sunday, a nearby shooting cut short the annual Caribbean cultural festival at Institute Park.<sup>1</sup> This was not an isolated incident. In July, two Worcester residents were shot before the suspect initiated an armed standoff with police,<sup>2</sup> and another man was shot and robbed in a separate occurrence.<sup>3</sup>

The consequences of this bloodshed are impossible to overstate. People are being hurt, families are being destroyed, and Worcester 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, especially the communities of color disproportionately harmed by gun violence.<sup>4</sup>

Worcester can work toward that goal in several different ways. First, WPD 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. Second, WPD must prioritize equity in its workplace policies. WPD has been particularly deficient in this area, necessitating a Department of Justice investigation for

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<sup>1</sup> Craig S. Semon, *Double shooting shuts down Worcester Caribbean American Carnival*, TELEGRAM & GAZETTE (Aug. 27, 2023), <https://www.telegram.com/story/news/crime/2023/08/27/double-shooting-shuts-down-worcester-caribbean-american-carnival-sunday/70696400007/>.

<sup>2</sup> Melanie Matts, *Police: Standoff ends, man accused of shooting family members arrested*, BOSTON.COM (July 7, 2023), <https://www.boston.com/news/crime/2023/07/07/police-surround-worcester-home-of-21-year-old-shooting-suspect/>.

<sup>3</sup> Samantha York, Dakota Antelman, & Mari Salazar, *Police investigating after man shot and robbed in Worcester*, 7 NEWS BOS. (July 26, 2023), <https://whdh.com/news/police-investigating-after-man-shot-and-robbed-in-worcester/>.

<sup>4</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/>.

discriminatory policing.<sup>5</sup> And third, WPD must improve its public transparency and accountability. WPD only recently began a body cam program after years of delay,<sup>6</sup> and forty-six of its officers are included in the Commonwealth's new police discipline database.<sup>7</sup> More openness and accountability are critical for building trust. WPD has a long way to go on both.

The City of Worcester 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 WPD must do more to foster the trust and respect of the diverse communities it serves. To ensure that Worcester 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 WPD at your earliest convenience.

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

Sincerely,

/s/

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

CC: Police Chief Steven Sargent

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<sup>5</sup> *Justice Department Launches Investigation of Worcester Police Department*, JUSTICE.GOV (Nov. 15, 2022), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-launches-investigation-worcester-police-department>.

<sup>6</sup> Sam Turken, *Worcester police to begin using body cams in late February*, GBH.ORG (Feb. 8, 2023), <https://www.wgbh.org/news/local/2023-02-08/worcester-police-to-begin-using-body-cams-in-late-february>.

<sup>7</sup> Brad Petrishen, *Mass. POST Commission releases police discipline database; 46 Worcester officers included*, TELEGRAM & GAZETTE (Aug. 22, 2023), <https://www.telegram.com/story/news/local/2023/08/22/mass-post-commission-police-discipline-database-46-worcester-officers/70647697007/>.