

Testimony before the House Judiciary Committee: Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and
Homeland Security

By Dorothy Johnson-Speight

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My name is Dorothy Johnson-Speight and I am Founder and Executive Director of Mothers In Charge (MIC). MIC is an organization comprised of mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and sisters, most of whom have lost a son, daughter or loved one to violence. We provide support services to individuals and families affected by violence.

However in addition to the grief and victims support programs, we focus a large amount of our efforts on violence prevention and intervention programs for children and families, along with other various community support services. These services include but are not limited to a mentoring program with juveniles offenders incarcerated at the Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center (PICC) which is an adult facility housing sometimes over 160 juveniles that have been court adjudicated as adults because of the type of crime committed, a reading program for youth at risk to increase their reading and academic skills and a female Rites of Passages program to encourage healthy relationships, self esteem and self respect for young females. Mothers In Charge also provides countless violence prevention workshops and seminars throughout the school district and the city of Philadelphia and surrounding areas.

There is a CULTURE OF VIOLENCE AMONG OUR YOUTH. With the violent movies and violent video games that gives points for the best shot and the music that promotes using a handgun to settle conflict or handle frustration, our youth are bombarded with messages of violence on a daily basis. In Pennsylvania, a 16 year old can get his hands on an illegal handgun before he can a text book. There is something seriously wrong with that picture. This is mainly due to lax gun laws that allow straw purchasers to walk into gun stores in PA and purchase handguns in about 40 minutes with no waiting period, and no fingerprinting often times, those guns end up in the hands of our youth. While this issue is not about the responsible gun owner, it is about illegal guns that are killing our youth and destroying communities. Please know that no one is safe until we are all safe.

We believe in community involvement for change. Our communities feels the government needs to play a role in helping grass roots community organizations with concrete and immediate legislation , more funding, support of grass roots organizing, and citizen action, with this support a measurable reduction in crime would be visible. Whether it's Columbine, or on the streets of North Philly, we must save our most precious gift from God, our children. I would like to share a recent documentary we've done. This is a condensed piece of our message to the youth. We must do more, we must send a powerful message to our youth that violence is not the answer.

Turning the tide on violence's path to the grave or the penal system is our responsibility to future generations and it has to be a current local and national priority of our great nation starting with addressing our hurt, angry, and at risk youth.

Mothers in Charge, working for positive change in our communities, is an example of what can happen when we all make a commitment to make a difference. I know we could do so much more to save lives if we had committed partners in the schools, communities, and government. I applaud the courageous women of Mothers In Charge for their efforts

This spring we bring another message, our first book entitled Mothers In Charge "Faces Of Courage". A friend asked should there be a book telling the stories of how mothers and some fathers just like you, who have lost their dreams for the future, how their children were senselessly murdered. Yes, these stories are important because we want you to also know and understand this; we want you to know how these courageous women have turned their pain into a campaign for peace in Philadelphia, Norristown and Chester PA, New Jersey and Brooklyn, NY. We hope this collection of inspirational stories will be read by each one of you and it will move you to do something, anything you can to save a life.

Thank You