

# Rep Appeals For Aid With Springfield Gun Violence

By Colin A. Young  
State House News Service

A Springfield representative is asking Gov. Maura Healey to permanently increase the presence of the State Police and for federal law enforcement agencies to establish “a greater presence” in his city as it deals with an uptick in gun violence this year.

Rep. Bud Williams, the Springfield Democrat who chairs the Joint Committee on Racial Equity, Civil Rights, and Inclusion for the House, and the Black and Latino Legislative Caucus, said Wednesday that Springfield is “dealing with a more violent criminal element that has little respect for life” and announced plans to lobby state and federal authorities for more officers to be assigned to the city.

“Springfield is the capital of western Massachusetts and should be afforded all the public safety resources necessary to ensure a safe city. As Springfield goes, so goes the region,” Williams said. “It is clear we need more federal involvement to stem a rising crime rate going forward.”

The fourth-term rep said he would like to see more agents of the FBI, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and troopers of the Mass. State Police “permanently assigned” to fight crime in Springfield. Williams said he plans to outline his proposal to federal authorities next week, will ask U.S. Rep. Richard Neal of Springfield “to influence the Department of Justice regarding the assignment of personnel to Springfield,” and will talk directly to Gov. Healey about state troopers.

There were 20 shooting incidents in Springfield between June 1

and Aug. 14 this year, including 12 homicides, the city's police department said. Between Aug. 6 and Aug. 14 alone, Springfield experienced four gun violence homicides.

While the number of shootings was almost identical to the 21 shootings recorded during the same period of 2022, the Springfield Police Department said that last year's shootings resulted in only two homicides.

"What we are seeing is more fully automatic firearms and ghost guns than ever before and while there is a slight increase in shootings this year, we have seen more than 70 percent increase in the amount of firepower we recover. That is troubling," Springfield Police Superintendent Cheryl Clapprood said in an Aug. 14 press release.

Last week, Springfield Mayor Domenic Sarno and leaders of the Springfield Police Department met with representatives from the Massachusetts State Police, Commonwealth Interstate Narcotics Reduction Enforcement Team and Violent Fugitive Apprehension Section, Hampden County Sheriff's Department, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Drug Enforcement Administration and the FBI to "strategize ways from the law enforcement side to address this recent uptick in gun violence," the city said.

"The gun violence is a nationwide epidemic and needs to stop. Families and loved ones are grieving. What makes this situation even worse, is that the recent targeted criminal activity involving illegal guns could have been avoided as these crimes many a times were committed by repeat violent criminal offenders. Criminal suspects that often times have prior arrests and pending charges, most of the time involving illegal and ghost guns, but yet our courts and some judges believe these repeat violent criminal offenders are ok and not a threat to our residents and business community," Sarno said. "Yet, here we are again, as these violent criminal offenders continue to harass our neighborhoods and terrorize our

streets.”

Sarno said he had spoken multiple times with state Public Safety Secretary Terrence Reidy “about increased suppression patrols and he has reassured me and Police Superintendent Cheryl Clapprood that we will have the continued and increased support and partnership from the State Police to tackle this recent uptick of gun violence head on.”

The same day that Sarno huddled with a panoply of law enforcement agencies, Springfield police responded to an incident in which a 34-year-old man forcibly entered another unit in the multi-family house in which he lived, shot and killed a 52-year-old woman, a 12-year-old girl and a dog, and shot and wounded a 10-year-old girl before fatally turning his gun on himself.

Clapprood called the killings “one of the most heart-wrenching incidents I can remember” in her 40-plus years with the department.

Williams said he is particularly concerned with an “influx of illegal weapons from the 91 Corridor – gun running from New York to Vermont” that passes through and often stops in Springfield. He said offenders should be prosecuted on federal charges in U.S. District Court “to maximize sentences.”

“We need more federal sentencing to send a strong message to offenders,” Williams said.

Sarno sounded a similar message last week, saying that the “bad actors” fueling the city’s gun violence surge “have not and do not take advantage” of youth development, mental health, street outreach or re-entry programs that his administration funds.

“The only thing they would understand is incarceration,” the mayor said.