**UU FAITHACTION GUN**

**VIOLENCE PREVENTION TASK FORCE REPORT 2021**

**Chair, Liandra Pires**

Good morning. I’m Liandra Pires, UU Faith Action Board Member and chair of the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force.

Today is the 5-year anniversary of the Pulse nightclub shooting, where 49 people were shot and killed because of their sexual orientation.

I would now like to take a moment of silence to remember **all** the victims of gun violence. (20 sec.)

It was a hot summer afternoon. Right down the street from me, there were kids eating ice cream at Dairy Queen, people playing tennis, teenagers at the basketball court, and people walking their dogs. I heard a loud bang. “What was that?” I soon found out that it was the sound of a gunshot, and a 20-year-old man lay dying on the basketball court. This shocked me. Things like this “don’t happen” in my safe Teaneck neighborhood. This happened last Saturday, during gun violence awareness weekend.

A few days later, an 18-year-old high school student was shot and killed in Maplewood. Last month, at a birthday party in Bridgeton, there was a mass shooting where 12 people were injured, and three people died. These were just a few of the hundreds of shootings that happen every day.

Even though NJ has the 2nd strictest gun laws in the country, people are still being shot and killed. There is an epidemic of gun violence in this country which has become so commonplace, many people just take it for granted and say, oh well, this is the way it is. But this is a public health crisis and it needs to end.

**What We Have Been Working On**:

REPRESENTING GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AT UU FAITH ACTION EVENTS:

* The overall theme of the 2020 UU FaithAction Issues Conference was gun violence prevention. We had 2 excellent GVP Keynote speakers, Jai Patel, from Students Demand Action, and Kelly Sampson, Senior Counsel and Director of Racial Justice, for BRADY. And at last year’s Annual Meeting, Carole Stiller, President, State Executive Committee of Brady NJ, was our special guest speaker.

TASK FORCE MEETINGS:

* We have had guest speakers from Moms Demand Action and Students Demand Action, and Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) and BeSMART presentations. We will be having more guest speakers from our coalition partners at upcoming meetings.

LEGISLATION:

* We are working on tracking NJ and federal legislation, including several bills from Governor Murphy’s legislative package, Combating Gun Violence 3.0 and President Biden and Vice President Harris’ six initial actions to address gun violence.

ACTION:

* Gun Violence Awareness Day/Wear Orange weekend was started to honor the life of Hadiya Pendleton, a 15-yr old high school student who was shot and killed in her hometown in Chicago a week after marching in President Obama’s 2013 Inaugural parade. Activists celebrated her life by wearing the color orange which is the color that hunters wear, so they are not shot.
	+ - The task force took action by emailing a proclamation to their town councils asking for a Gun Violence Awareness Day, every year, on the first Friday in June. The team also asked their town councils to honor all victims of gun violence by having Wear Orange weekend in their town. We will continue this effort next year to get even more town councils to sign on.
		- Team members sent the proclamation to over 13 NJ town councils.
		- 4 town councils signed the proclamation
	+ Over the past several years, UU members have been part of the working group for the Safe Storage bill, including Rev. Rob Gregson, Jeannine Clayton-Coyne, Helen Ewan and I am honored to join that team.
		- The task force members will be working on writing letters to legislators to support the Safe Storage for Firearms Bill.

NETWORKING:

* We have been networking and making connections with coalition partner organizations, especially BIPOC organizations to foster relationships where we can work towards fighting racism and engage in grassroots racial and social justice campaigns.
* We have Co-Sponsored events with coalition partners, such as the March for Our Lives Roundtable with Attorney Generals discussing The Iron Pipeline, Policing, and more. The panelists included the NJ, NY, and PA attorney generals. The Chief Deputy Attorney General stood in for the Delaware Attorney General who ironically was in the hospital visiting 3 police officers who had been shot.

Gun violence prevention is a crucial issue all over the country, including New Jersey. No more excuses. No more thoughts and prayers without action. No more delay. Together, we can save lives.

If you’re interested in getting involved, we are always looking for new members to join our task force. Also, I am actively seeking a co-chair to join our team. If you are interested or have any questions, please contact me at GVPrevention@uufaithaction.nj.