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3237 S. Morgan St.  
Chicago, IL 60608

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The Hon. Edward J. Acevedo  
Illinois House of Representatives  
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Representative Acevado,

I live in your district at 3237 S. Morgan St. in the neighborhood of Bridgeport. I will receive my B.A. in Psychology from Roosevelt University in December, and I hope to spend my career working with youth in underserved populations here in Chicago. As I've volunteered with various youth programs, I've gotten to know some children and parents who have been directly affected by the issue of youth violence.

I recently had the privilege of a conversation with a parent named Maria. She told me about her son, Matthew, whose nickname on the streets was "Bobo" which is Spanish for clown. Though Matthew had a brief affiliation with a gang when he was younger, he was one of the few to successfully leave that lifestyle. He was well-known on the streets as a "neutron" – a neutral party with no gang connections. He wanted to be a firefighter like his grandfather and had already spent several years volunteering at the firehouse. His mother told me, "He was going to be a hero." However, one night while walking the two blocks between his friend's house and home, he was randomly chosen as a target and was shot in the face. He died two days later at 17 years old. One thing that Maria kept reiterating was, "The world missed out." But not only is society left without the benefit of Matthew's life, Maria is left with unimaginable grief. As I'm sure you know, Matthew's story is not an isolated incident.

Please do what you can to increase the funding for after school programs and specifically, for anti-violence initiatives here in Chicago. I'm confident that you and your constituency would support an end to the needless deaths of these promising young people. I acknowledge that there is no easy solution because research shows that many inter-related factors (e.g., poverty, parental involvement) are correlated with youth violence. However, we can take steps in the right direction. Provide mental health care for these youth and families to help with the grieving process. To prevent these incidents from ever occurring, provide programs with the funding that they need for attention-grabbing after school activities and mentoring programs.

Thank you,

Amanda Graanstra