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Good morning. My name is Dorothy Johnson-Speight and I am the Executive Director and Founder of *Mothers In Charge*. As the mother of a teenager living in Urban America, I always lived with some level of fear. The statistical data provides the grim facts: homicide is the leading cause of death of African American males between the ages of 14 and 24. These homicides are often perpetuated by offenders with long lists of criminal activity that also includes murder. I don't think any mothers or fathers should live with the fear and fact that their children may not be alive to see their 25th birthday.

My son Khaaliq graduated from college a few years earlier and was going back to complete his graduate degree in January. Our plan was that we would work with children at risk, I would get my Doctorate, and we would go into practice together. In December, only six months after his 24th birthday, I experienced my worst nightmare. My son became one of the statistics. At age 24 1/2 he was murdered; shot to death on the streets of Philadelphia over a parking space.

My story is like too many stories in all urban communities. December 6, 2001 just after midnight my phone rang. It was my stepson. He told me to come quickly - Khaaliq had been shot. My son had been shot 7 times by an angry man over a parking space that stopped only because his gun jammed. Because this man was so filled with hate, he stood over my bleeding son and kicked him in the face.

The person responsible for my son's death was caught over the next few days. A month later, while watching the late news I saw a plea from a mother who lost her son in the same neighborhood. She was looking for someone to step up and speak up with information in the fatal stabbing of her 19 year old, Justin. She had only a few clues that seem to be familiar to me. Because of my need to come forward with any information that may be pertinent to her case, I went in search to find this mother. After further investigation we learned that the same angry man that murdered my son Khaaliq had murdered her son Justin Donnelly, 5 months earlier. This man was seen in the community several times after Justin's death and because he was known as such a violent person in that community – the people of that community were afraid to come forward. They knew what he was capable of, and did not want to suffer the same fate. Because no

one came forward and provided information, he walked the streets every day until he murdered my son. I am constantly reminded that if one person had provided the necessary information before my son's murder, Khaaliq would still be alive today. I live with that awful pain everyday. His murderer was ultimately found guilty of first degree murder for both crimes and is currently serving two life sentences. Although justice was served it does not stop the pain I feel each day and it will not bring back my son.

In 2003, Ruth and I took our anger and pain and joined other mothers in starting ***Mothers In Charge***. We now have a membership of over 300 people and facilitate violence prevention and intervention programs for children, parent education programs, and other various community support services. These services include a mentoring program with the juvenile offenders housed in the House of Corrections, grief and loss group counseling sessions with the Carson Valley School and Residential Facility, as well as countless violence prevention workshop presentations throughout the school district and the city of Philadelphia. We are currently administering the Reading STARS program, a program where we tutor challenged young people to increase their reading skills, as well as run two female rites of passage programs to encourage self-esteem and self-respect among the young female population. We have chapters in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and its surrounding communities, as well as chapters soon opening in New York, North Carolina, Georgia, and California.

In addition, ***Mothers In Charge*** has become an integral part of The Step Up, Speak Up (SUSU) Campaign. SUSU began as a partnership between the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Philadelphia Division's Community Relations Unit, Mothers In Charge and Clear Channel Outdoor in an effort to encourage citizens living in the Philadelphia area to cooperate with law enforcement.

The SUSU initiative is an outreach program to reduce community-wide fear and intimidation and to encourage citizens to cooperate and provide information to law enforcement. The campaign was created as a response to the "Stop Snitching" and the "Don't Talk 2 Police" t-shirts, video and music. Law enforcement agencies rely and depend on the cooperation and testimony of witnesses and recognize that witnesses sometimes feel intimidated even when there is no actual danger of retaliation. The Step Up, Speak Up campaign is not a structured organization, but a process to support goals and activities that emerge from grass roots community organizations attempting to encourage witness cooperation.

Although there is no legal obligation to contact the police or other law enforcement agencies, the information provided by witnesses could make the difference in bringing a criminal to justice. Citizen cooperation could prevent further crimes and protect others from becoming victims. It is a criminal offense to intimidate a witness or anyone assisting law enforcement in an investigation. Some forms of intimidation are community-wide and subtle, such as the "Stop Snitching" apparel and the display of this apparel and those messages through popular music and videos. The SUSU campaign is a response to those subtle forms of intimidation.

In addition to fear, a witness may be deterred from providing information and testifying because of strong community ties and a distrust of therefore, in addition to providing a resource list for the public with the contact numbers of law enforcement agencies they can call if they have information about a violent crime, the Step Up, Speak Up brochure specifically contains a resource list with the contact numbers for government witness programs and community groups which support and affirm the role of witnesses in solving and reducing violent crime.

Mothers In Charge and SUSU is an example of what can happen when we make a commitment to make a difference. We have to understand the importance of witness intimidation and create ways to counteract it in protecting our nation's citizens against these violent criminals. If we are unable to protect and support our communities in wanting to speak up about criminal activity, it will continue to undermine the hard work of law enforcement agencies and grassroots organizations. We need judicial and legislative assistance to rid our communities of witness intimidation with stricter legislation; this will in turn allow law abiding citizens to feel safer in coming forward with information that can rid our streets of violent, repeat offenders.

Thank You.