

# ***Safe Streets for Whom: Why the “Rise in Crime” Rhetoric is Dangerous”***

## **Facilitator Guide for GHIAA Core Teams**

### **Background:**

This *Safe Streets for Whom: Why the “Rise in Crime” Rhetoric is Dangerous”* is a 33-minute digital presentation created by GHIAA organizers and leaders to unpack an intentional misinformation campaign being promulgated by a group called “Safe Streets CT.” This group is a front for a political strategy in Connecticut designed to roll back recent and successful reforms in youth and criminal justice and to unseat politicians who appear weak on crime. “Safe Streets CT” is using recent spikes in car thefts to allege a major rise in crime rates in Connecticut’s suburbs, linking, without data, urban (code for black and brown) youth to these thefts.

GHIAA congregations need to understand how this misinformation campaign is being waged so that we can stop any dangerous legislation that seeks to “crack down” on youth and/or roll back important criminal and youth justice reforms passed in the last few years.

GHIAA worked hard, with partners, to pass Clean Slate Legislation and the Police Accountability Bill in the last legislative session. Part of the organizing process is to make sure our successful campaigns stand. This current “rise in crime” fear mongering campaign seeks to undermine these advances through dangerous and racist strategies. This is important to GHIAA because of our commitment to criminal justice and our commitment to being an anti-racist power organization.

### **How to Use This Video:**

GHIAA core teams are encouraged to host a viewing of this presentation for members of your congregation, either in person or on zoom. The suggested length for such a gathering is 90-120 minutes (about 2 hours). In this guide you will find:

- Sample invitation to congregants
- Sample agenda for education session (one and two hour formats)
- Links to additional resources and information on this topic
- Important call to action for GHIAA members

While a group teach-in session is highly encouraged, this presentation also stands on its own and can be shared with this link: [www.cljct.org/youth-justice](http://www.cljct.org/youth-justice)

## Sample Invitation:

Dear Congregants,

Our congregation is a member of the Greater Hartford Action Alliance (GHIAA), and we are members of our congregation's GHIAA Core Team. GHIAA has issued an important Call to Action. There is an urgent need to understand a dangerous misinformation campaign happening in Connecticut related to a recent increase in car thefts. Please join us to view a video presentation produced by GHIAA to help us understand this misinformation, how it will lead to the incarceration of more Black and Brown youth, and what we need to do to stop it.

When:

Where:

Time:

RSVP:

## Sample Agenda for a Two-Hour Teach-in Session

\*If you would like to do this on zoom and need access to a zoom account or need someone to run the zoom technical pieces, GHIAA staff can help!

### **5 minutes: Welcome and Opening Prayer**

Small Number, Zoom Meeting - invite people to introduce themselves.

Large Number, Zoom Meeting - invite people to put their name in the chat or,

In Person Meeting - let them know they will be introducing themselves to a partner in a moment.

### **15 minutes: Individual Meetings**

Invite people to pair off 1:1. If on zoom, send people into breakout rooms for a 1:1. Sample prompt: What brings you fear and why? Be specific. Share a story.

### **5 minutes: Individual Meeting Debrief**

Does anyone want to share in a word or a short phrase what they are afraid of? Do not share your partners' fear without permission. Just share your own.

### **10 minutes: Intro by Clergy**

Why is this issue important to our faith tradition? What does our faith tradition say about fear? About caring for children? About criminal justice? \*If you do not have a member of your clergy

team able to do this, we have pre-recorded material from several GHIAA faith leaders reflecting on fear that you could show.

**5 minutes: Introduction to the Video:**

I am a member of GHIAA's core team and on behalf of our core team, thank you for being here. We are going to watch a video produced by GHIAA organizers and leaders that unpacks a dangerous misinformation campaign around car thefts and crime. GHIAA has issued a call to action for us to contact our legislators to address this issue. Let us watch this video, and then we will have time for discussion. We also have more specific information on the call to action.

**30 minutes: Show video:** <https://vimeo.com/684737671>

**20 minutes: Debrief/Resources:**

- Who would like to share a brief reaction to the film? Let us start with how we are feeling.
- What questions do you have? We may not have the answers to every question but will write them down and share them with GHIAA organizers and get back to you. You may also find answers in the list of resources we have to share tonight.

**15: Minutes: GHIAA's Call to Action:**

Contact your legislators and let them know you do not support knee jerk legislation resulting from the rise in crime rhetoric.

**Background on this Call to Action:**

- Right now, Connecticut is in a legislative session. The legislative session runs until May 4.
- It is possible that law makers will attempt to pass legislation that attempts to "crack down," on youth as a way of showing they are being "tough on crime." Our partners in youth justice and criminal justice are fighting to make sure this does not happen as this legislation would be a knee jerk reaction to this false rhetoric around crime and theft. It would result in more Black and Brown youth being incarcerated.
- Examples of policies being suggested as a response to the "rise in crime" fear: There is an interest in lowering the age at which we can arrest youth (currently a 10 year old can be arrested and they want it to be lowered to 7 years old), there are efforts to make it easier to detain youth, there are efforts to reopen a youth prison....this rise in crime rhetoric is being used to advance the kinds of policies that stand in stark contrast to the criminal justice and anti-racism efforts GHIAA supports.
- While this "tough on crime" strategy is a national and local strategy of the Republican party, it is a bipartisan issue. There are Democrats who are supporting these strategies because members of their suburban communities are expressing fear around crime. GHIAA is nonpartisan and GHIAA's response is non-partisan. We are exposing the

unfounded claims of politicians from both parties and groups like “Safe Streets CT.” Our elected leaders, regardless of their political party, need to be contacted immediately.

How to Respond:

- Identify your local legislators. You can do so by searching here: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/CGAFindleg.asp>
- Ideally, it would be best to set up a 30-minute meeting soon with your state senator and representative to discuss this issue. GHIAA organizers are available to help.
- Individually, please call AND email your legislators. GHIAA has provided a sample letter/script.

### **15 minutes: Commitments and Sharing of Ideas**

Ask people to share what they will commit to doing – invite other action ideas to be shared

- Is there a possibility of a group legislative visit?
- Are people willing to contact their legislators individually?
- How can this message be shared with more members of the congregation?

## **Sample Agenda for a One Hour Teach-in Session**

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### **5 minutes: Welcome and Opening Prayer**

### **5 minutes: Introduction to the Video:**

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### **30 minutes: Show video**

## **20: Minutes: GHIAA's Call to Action and sharing of resources for deeper learning:**

Contact your legislators and let them know you do not support knee jerk legislation resulting from the rise in crime rhetoric.

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## **SAMPLE LETTER FOR LEGISLATORS**

Dear Senator/Representative:

Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am your constituent. My address is \_\_\_\_\_ . I am also a member of [name your congregation] and we are members of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, along with 50 other congregations in Greater Hartford. We are aware of the misinformation campaign happening around car thefts and the rise in crime rhetoric which is being linked to youth without data to support such claims. We oppose any legislation that aims to roll back positive youth justice reforms and/or make it easier to detain and arrest youth. Now is the time to be investing in issues that really matter to youth – mental health treatment, affordable housing, public education, job training, healthcare.... services that all youth deserve access to outside of the criminal justice system.

While we have seen isolated spikes in crime, we are not seeing a crime wave pandemic and I do not support any legislation that aims to crack down on juvenile justice.

*[Pick a few data points to make your case – it is most effective to write individual letters and not use form letters. Include a few facts from these resources to support your position or letter – this is also useful in educating your elected officials. Do not assume they are getting access to balanced reporting on this issue.]*

*Resources with data include:*

- *A report from the TOW institute on car thefts and youth in CT can be found by [clicking here](#).*
- *Many other resources with data can be found at [www.cljct.org/youth-justice](http://www.cljct.org/youth-justice)*

I, along with all GHIAA partners, are watching this issue closely. GHIAA produced an educational video on car thefts and the rise in crime fear mongering happening through the “Safe Streets CT” effort and is sharing it among our 50 congregations. We invite you to watch it and share it with any of your constituents who would benefit from this information. [www.cljct.org/youth-justice](http://www.cljct.org/youth-justice)

Sincerely,