

Opening Statement

JEC Hearing on “The Economic Toll of Gun Violence: How Our Nation Bears the Costs”

Wednesday, July 20 at 2:30pm ET

Violent crime is on the rise in communities across America. Suicides and other deaths of despair are at record highs, homicides are climbing again, and police officers are retiring at unprecedented rates. Meanwhile, mass public shootings in Uvalde, Texas and Highland Park, Illinois have renewed the national conversation about how we can stop the evil perpetrated in these horrific events.

Mass shooters who carry out highly visible acts of violence are fueled by an evil desire to inflict on others the despair and isolation they suffer themselves. It is our collective responsibility to understand why deadly violence is increasing and how to address its root causes.

Research from my staff on the Joint Economic Committee shows that most mass public shooters are suicidal, and they are less likely to have connections to family or work. They tend to live in communities where violence is concentrated, and where their support systems have unraveled.

Similar trends are true for the less talked about—but more prevalent—violence that is reflected in the 29 percent increase in the homicide rate in 2020, and the decades-long rise in suicide and other deaths of despair.

These findings on the role of supportive families and communities suggest that the circumstances that lead to violence go far beyond the simple presence of a firearm.

Nonetheless, every time a horrific event occurs, like the shootings in Uvalde and Highland Park, we immediately hear demands for the same one-size-fits-all gun control mandates from Washington that many have pushed for decades. Yet policies to stop violent crime must be faithful to the Constitution and must not inadvertently harm the very citizens we are trying to protect.

At its core, the Second Amendment guarantees the right to keep and bear arms, to defend one's family and community. My staff estimates that defensive gun use helped avoid more than \$120 billion in crime last year alone. Limiting our fundamental rights under the Second Amendment makes us *less* secure, not more.

Addressing our violence epidemic will not be achieved with top-down rules from Washington, but with the much harder work of reversing the decline in social capital in communities across America. We should look to community-led solutions focused on cultivating stable, two-parent families, strengthening employment opportunities, boosting institutional trust, enforcing laws

already on the books, and supporting local programs that help those at highest risk for violence.

While far more daunting than proposals to simply restrict access to firearms, these solutions would be far more effective at preventing violence and providing support to struggling individuals in our communities.

The decades-long decline in violent crime has ended. Deaths of despair are increasing, and mass public shootings continue to scar our communities. Understanding the causes of increased violence is more urgent than ever.

I hope that our conversation today considers how we might alleviate the childhood trauma, isolation, lack of stable employment, and low levels of community trust that contribute to increased acts of violence.

Family and civil society breakdown come with dangerous consequences. Confronting the underlying causes of violent crime must play a key role in our efforts to keep American communities safe and prosperous.

Thank you.