



Testimony of Sarah Burd-Sharps  
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Joint Economic Committee Hearing on  
The Economic Toll of Gun Violence: How Our Nation Bears the Cost

July 20, 2022

Good afternoon, Chairman Beyer, Vice Chair Heinrich, and members of the committee. It is an honor to appear before you to testify on the economic cost of gun violence in the United States.

My name is Sarah Burd-Sharps, and I am the senior director of research at Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, the largest gun violence prevention organization in the United States.

With tragic and numbing regularity in America, we hear of shootings on our streets, in grocery stores, schools, hospitals, and too many other places. Each day in America, roughly 300 people join the toll of those killed and injured with guns, lives cut short or forever altered by gun violence.<sup>1</sup>

While not everyone directly experiences gun violence, we all pay an economic price for this epidemic.

Without a doubt, the human cost of gun violence—the people who are taken from us and survivors who are wounded—is the most devastating. No dollar amount could ever fully convey the cost of gun violence for families, survivors, and communities. But examining the serious economic consequences of gun violence offers a wider lens for understanding just how extensive and expensive this crisis is. Our hope is that this research will help guide you and your colleagues as you weigh different policies and actions to build safer communities.

To garner this understanding, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund worked with the leading health economist researching the cost of various types of injuries, Ted R. Miller, along with his Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) colleagues David I. Swedler and Bruce A. Lawrence, and Kathryn Schnippel Bistline, formerly at Everytown, to calculate the economic cost of gun violence in the United States. This work is based on gun death data from the CDC, nonfatal gun hospitalization data from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality of the HHS, as well as direct hospital records, and peer-reviewed research that establishes costs for police investigations, court salaries, incarceration, ambulance and EMT, mental health services, and more.

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<sup>1</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, “EveryStat: United States,” accessed July 2022, <https://everystat.org/>.



We found that the unrelenting epidemic of gun violence is costing our nation \$557 billion annually.<sup>2</sup> To put that into perspective, that works out to the equivalent of 2.6 percent of our gross domestic product<sup>3</sup> on gun violence each year. Year after year.

And the government share of these costs—paid for by taxpayers—is \$12.6 billion each year.<sup>4</sup> That’s \$12.6 billion dollars that could cover proven community violence intervention programs, suicide prevention efforts, the implementation of life-saving gun safety laws, and other efforts that prevent this violence from occurring in the first place.

This \$557 billion is a conservative estimate. It represents the lifetime costs associated with gun violence starting at the scene of a shooting and continuing on to the long-term physical and mental health care and criminal justice and other costs. It also includes estimates for the quality-of-life lost over a victim’s lifespan for pain and suffering, as is common in jury awards for injury and accident cases.<sup>5</sup>

It does not even begin to include the wider ripple effects on whole communities. And those wider costs are not marginal. If you talk to any school superintendent, Mayor, or trauma surgeon in a town that has experienced a shooting, they can produce a long list of costs that extend far beyond the immediate items we are counting. These include costs to address the trauma of children who don’t want to return to school, costs to neighborhood businesses and home values, and the larger reverberations on all those who live in a community where gun violence happens or share an identity with someone who was the target of a shooting, whether it’s domestic violence survivors, LGBTQ+ individuals after the 2016 shooting at Pulse nightclub, or Black people after the shooting in Buffalo two months ago.

This \$557 billion price tag breaks down to costs in the following basic areas:

- \$2.8 billion in medical costs (out-of-pocket from families, employer-covered costs, government programs);
- \$11 billion in police and criminal justice costs (government costs borne by taxpayers);
- \$0.5 billion in costs to employers;
- \$53.8 billion in work-loss (forgone earnings of those killed or disabled); and

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<sup>2</sup> Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund, “The Economic Cost of Gun Violence,” July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>.

<sup>3</sup> Everytown analysis of Q4 2019 (Line 1: “Gross Domestic Product”) data from the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, “National Income and Product Accounts, Table 1.1.5. Gross Domestic Product,” June 29, 2022, <https://apps.bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?reqid=19&step=2#reqid=19&step=2&isuri=1&1921=survey>.

<sup>4</sup> Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund, “Methodological Note for the Economic Cost of Gun Violence,” July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/methodological-note-cost-of-gun-violence/>. Government costs paid for by taxpayers fall into six categories: medical and mental health care for firearm injuries; emergency transport; police response; criminal justice; Medicaid for general (non-firearm-related) healthcare; and federal Supplemental Security Income.

<sup>5</sup> Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund, “Methodological Note for the Economic Cost of Gun Violence,” July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/methodological-note-cost-of-gun-violence/>.



- \$489.1 billion in quality-of-life costs.<sup>6</sup>

The annual cost for overall gun violence in the United States is \$1,698 for every resident, combining the directly-measurable costs plus losses incurred by survivors and their families, employers, the government, and society more broadly. However, in states with stronger gun laws, the economic toll of gun violence is less than half this amount, whereas in states where gun laws are weaker and gun injuries and fatalities are higher, gun violence costs residents double or more this amount.<sup>7</sup>

For example, Mississippi has long been challenged by high levels of gun violence.<sup>8</sup> It has the weakest gun laws in the country.<sup>9</sup> At an average cost of **\$3,323 per resident** each year, Mississippi has the second-highest per resident cost of gun violence in the US.<sup>10</sup> This is an incredibly high burden for Mississippians.

On the other hand, in Massachusetts—which has the lowest rate of gun deaths<sup>11</sup> and some of the strongest gun laws in the nation<sup>12</sup>—residents carry a far lighter burden. The average cost of gun violence is **\$503 per resident**, the lowest outlay from gun violence in the US,<sup>13</sup> allowing the state and its residents to allocate far more dollars to productive investments.

Following each major shooting incident, some key in on mental health as a primary cause. Yet research shows clearly that the US is not an outlier in terms of rates of mental illness when compared to Europe, Australia, Canada, our peer nations; we all face very similar challenges and rates. Where we are an outlier is in the toll of gun violence: our gun death rate is 13 times higher<sup>14</sup> and our gun homicide rate is 26 times higher<sup>15</sup> than these peer high-income nations. We place ourselves at a severe economic disadvantage in the global economy with these enormous outlays. This is money that could be invested in essential public goods like education, workforce development, and in building healthier, safer, more sustainable communities.

Proven investments such as local street outreach programs that mediate conflicts or hospital programs that engage and support patients after a violent injury, save lives and save money. An analysis of

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<sup>6</sup> Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund, “The Economic Cost of Gun Violence,” July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>.

<sup>7</sup> Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund, “The Economic Cost of Gun Violence,” July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>.

<sup>8</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, “EveryStat: Mississippi,” accessed July 2022, <https://everystat.org/#Mississippi>.

<sup>9</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, “Everytown Gun Law Rankings,” accessed July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/rankings/>.

<sup>10</sup> Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund, “The Economic Cost of Gun Violence,” July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>.

<sup>11</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, “EveryStat: Massachusetts,” <https://everystat.org/#Massachusetts>.

<sup>12</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, “Everytown Gun Law Rankings,” accessed July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/rankings/>.

<sup>13</sup> Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund, “The Economic Cost of Gun Violence,” July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>.

<sup>14</sup> Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun deaths by country (2015 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun homicides by country (2013 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).



Richmond, California’s Operation Peacemaker found that over five years, the program saved the city over \$535 million.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Sacramento, California’s Advance Peace program found that for every dollar spent on efforts to end cyclical and retaliatory gun violence, the city saved between \$18–41 dollars due to reduced services needed to respond to this violence.<sup>17</sup> These are just a few examples of communities that have invested in these programs and experienced considerable savings as a result of the deaths and injuries prevented.

Our research clearly shows we are spending precious funds on a preventable epidemic that brings nothing of benefit and plenty of heartbreak and shattered lives. While we are so grateful for the actions Congress took recently to address gun violence, there is still much more we can do to reduce the cost of this epidemic—both human and financial.

With 110 lives taken and \$1.5 billion spent every day, there is no time to waste.

Thank you again, Chairman Beyer, Vice Chair Heinrich, and members of the committee, for allowing me to testify today. I look forward to your questions.

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<sup>16</sup> Rachel Huguet et al., “Cost Benefit Analysis: Operation Peace Maker,” 2016, [https://www.advancepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/6-USC\\_ONS\\_CBA.pdf](https://www.advancepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/6-USC_ONS_CBA.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Jason Corburn and Amanda Fukutome-Lopez, “Outcome Evaluation of Advance Peace Sacramento, 2018–2019,” March 2020, <https://www.advancepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Corburn-and-F-Lopez-Advance-Peace-Sacramento-2-Year-Evaluation-03-2020.pdf>.