

## **Testimony of Tina Meins**

### **On “Gun Violence in America: Understanding and Reducing the Costs of Firearm Injuries and Deaths”**

#### **United States Joint Economic Committee**

**September 18, 2019**

Good morning Chairman Lee, Vice Chair Maloney, and members of the Joint Economic Committee. It is an honor to appear before you to testify on the important topic of gun violence in America.

My name is Tina Meins and I live in Washington, DC but I grew up in California. Today, I am here as a daughter, a sister, a fiancée and a proud recent graduate from the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University.

Today, I represent the 58% of Americans who have said they or someone they care for have experienced gun violence in their lifetime.

I am here in honor of my father, Damian, who was shot and killed. He was my travel buddy and my best friend. Today, I am my father’s voice.

My dad, mom, sister and I were all extremely close. He was intelligent, hard-working, had a great sense of humor and loved to make people laugh. He lived his life in service to others. It didn’t matter if he was mowing a neighbor’s lawn, helping a friend move or taking care of a sick family member—he was always generous with his time.

He loved his family deeply. Our lives have not been the same since he was taken.

I will never forget the shock, panic and heart break when I learned my dad was killed along with 13 of his co-workers on December 2, 2015 in San Bernardino, California.

That day my dad, Damian Meins, was attending a mandatory work training event for the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health, at the Inland Regional Center. My dad was standing by the Christmas tree during a break, when another co-worker and his wife, who had pledged allegiance to the terrorist group ISIS, burst through the doors and began shooting. In seconds, my dad was shot five times and his life was over.

There are no words to express the profound loss we experienced with my dad’s death. As for the economic impact, our family had access to financial support because the shooting occurred during a work event and was also deemed a terrorist attack. We received critical resources from workers compensation funds, life insurance and the Victim Compensation Fund.

Additionally, the nation came together, and many people were incredibly kind, and generous enough to donate to the victims of the San Bernardino attacks through different Go Fund Me efforts. With these funds, we were able to hold the funeral for my father and make sure his family could attend. However, because of the complex laws surrounding taxation of these varying types of monies, my mother has also faced ongoing IRS issues since 2016. She cites lost future earnings from my dad as the biggest financial burden, but points out that this cannot compare to the emotional toll of losing your high school sweetheart and husband of 36 years in such a horrific fashion.

I was fortunate that my own workplace at the time was very supportive and allowed me to stay off work for two months. However, as an employee I had to use all my bereavement, sick time and vacation time, and after that was exhausted, I went unpaid in order to be with my family as we grieved.

However, most Americans who experience gun violence don't have the same access to financial support and donations or flexibility with their employment to pick up the pieces of their lives after having been shattered by a bullet.

And although my dad didn't survive the shooting on December 2, there were dozens of people who did and still have the emotional and physical scars.

I have permission to share the experience of Julie who was actually standing next to my dad, next to the Christmas tree, when the shooting occurred. She is special to my family because she was able to relay the last seconds of my dad's life to us.

Julie was 50 years old at the time of the shooting. She was shot twice and has had five surgeries that left her with significant scar tissue, which causes problems of its own. She has a tremendous amount of bullet fragmentation still left in her body, and will forever be concerned about lead poisoning.

Though Julie loved her job and her co-workers the shooting effectively ended her career; she was never able to return to work. Julie actually thinks she was one of the more fortunate survivors because her husband was the main breadwinner in her family. She knows of other shooting survivors that shouldered the financial responsibilities of their families or were unmarried, and have had far greater financial difficulties. We know of other victims and survivors who were forced to cover the costs of medications and counseling services when their requests for workers' compensation were not approved or were delayed in being approved. Many victims and survivors have taken medical retirement or are in the process of doing so. Some people just resigned because they could not take the ongoing stress as a result of the trauma. The trauma has affected survivors' family and friends, as well, with at least one family member dying by suicide since the attack.

Across the country, survivors of gunshot wounds experience difficulties ranging from psychological trauma, loss of work, and steep medical costs. One study estimated that between 2003 and 2013, there was an annual average of 30,617 hospital admissions for firearm injuries in the United States. For each admission, average costs ranged from approximately \$19,000 per handgun injury to over \$32,000 per assault weapon injury. Even after the immediate hospital costs, survivors of gunshot wounds face a lifetime of medical care costs including readmission to the hospital and nursing care. Several studies have found that the lifetime costs of providing care following a gunshot wound are more than twice the costs of providing acute care. One study put the cumulative lifetime costs of treating gunshot wounds incurred in a single year in this country at \$2.3 billion.

I've been living with grief and loss for nearly four years since my dad was ripped from our lives. But I have not been standing by silently. As a member of the Everytown Survivor Network, I share my story to put a human face on our nation's gun violence crisis. Our community of survivors advocates for change to help ensure that no other family faces the type of tragedy we have experienced.

We should all be free to live without the fear of being shot. No one law can stop all gun violence, but there's so much more we must do to keep our families safe. The House of Representatives has already passed bipartisan legislation to require background checks on all gun sales and is considering a strong Red Flag law. Now, the Senate must act on background checks and pass a strong Red Flag bill.

I am not alone in my support of stronger gun safety laws. We know 95 percent of Americans support background checks on all gun sales and 85 percent support Red Flag laws. And every day, 100 Americans are shot and killed and hundreds more are wounded. This is not a right or left issue, this is a life or death issue.

Thank you for your time and thank you for listening.