



Testimony of Rebecca G. Fischer
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House Committee on the Judiciary
“Victims of Violence Crime in Manhattan”
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Good Morning, Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member Nadler and members of the House Judiciary Committee. My name is Rebecca Fischer and I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers Against Gun Violence, the only statewide gun violence prevention organization in New York. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today.

As the Executive Director of New Yorkers Against Gun Violence, I have devoted my career to reducing gun violence in this state. I care deeply about the safety and well-being of all New Yorkers and work day in and day out to support and uplift victims and survivors of gun violence. I am steadfast in my commitment to the safety of New Yorkers not only because it is my job, but also because I am also a very proud resident of New York City and a parent raising my own young children here. Our team at New Yorkers Against Gun Violence lives and works in New York City and they, too, have families here. Their parents, their siblings, their children and their neighbors are of utmost importance to me. We all know and work with victims and survivors of gun violence every day. And we all want this city and this state to be as safe as it can be.

At New Yorkers Against Gun Violence and New Yorkers Against Gun Violence Education Fund, we take a comprehensive approach to reducing gun violence. We advocate for strong, sensible gun regulations, such as background checks and extreme risk protection order laws, funding for evidence-based violence intervention and prevention services, and we also

have our own gun violence education and victim support program in New York City public schools. I will tell you more about our work but first I want to explain why we do what we do.

Because New York has strong leadership, New York City and New York State have some of the strongest gun violence prevention laws and programs in the country and, as a result, some of the lowest gun death and injury rates. In fact, New York State ranks 47th out of the 50 states in gun violence rates.¹ However, New Yorkers are still being killed, injured, and traumatized by gun violence each year because we are ravaged by the national gun trafficking crisis.^{2,3} The national gun trafficking crisis is largely the result of weak gun laws in other states and the fact that Congress has not enacted comprehensive federal gun reform laws.

Crime guns are illegally trafficked from weak-gun-law states in the South along the I-95 corridor, commonly known as the Iron Pipeline.⁴ In New York State, we are a model for the nation on strong gun laws—including a comprehensive background check system, a ban on assault weapons, a ban on ghost guns, and we have one of the strongest red flag laws in the country.⁵ In contrast, states along the iron pipeline like the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida have extremely weak gun laws and as a result, traffickers travel to these states to buy guns without a background check and then illegally transport them into New York.⁶ Traffickers go elsewhere to source guns quickly and illegally because gun purchasers are required to go through a

¹ “Firearm Mortality by State,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention / National Center for Health Statistics, Reviewed March 1, 2022.

https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/firearm_mortality/firearm.htm. Accessed April 15, 2023.

² “Gun Violence: The Impact on Public Health,” National Institute for Health Care Management, Updated July 12, 2022. <https://nihcm.org/publications/gun-violence-the-impact-on-public-health>. Accessed April 15, 2023.

³ “The Blueprint to End Gun Violence,” City Of New York, January 24, 2022.

<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2022/the-blueprint-to-end-gun-violence.pdf>. Accessed April 15, 2023.

⁴ “Five Things to Know about Crime Guns, Gun Trafficking, and Background Checks,” Everytown Research and Policy / Everytown Gun Safety Support Fund, Updated October 10, 2022. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/five-things-to-know-about-crime-guns/>. Accessed April 15, 2023.

⁵ “New York, NY: FFL Burglaries, Robberies & Larcenies 2017-2021,” Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives / National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment,” Reviewed February 1, 2023. <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/new-york-ny-state-report-mega-city/download>. Accessed April 15, 2023.

⁶ *Ibid.*

background check and licensing process in New York. These guns are brought into New York illegally, illegally sold on our streets, and then have the potential to be used in violent crimes.

From 2017 to 2021, New York City recovered and traced 19,013 crime guns.⁷ Over 70% of the crime guns recovered were originally purchased out-of-state.⁸ The top three “source” cities for crimes traced to known purchasers in Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia. These guns are then illegally trafficked to young people and communities that are the most vulnerable and impoverished. The guns are flowing to New York City neighborhoods that need and are entitled to more economic investment and small business support, affordable housing and stability, better access to education and healthy food, more social services, mental health support, survivor-centered programming, and so much more.^{9,10}

Gun violence impacts New Yorkers across the state and disproportionately impacts Black and Brown New Yorkers.¹¹ In New York State about 15% of the population is Black, yet approximately 65% of gun homicide victims are Black. In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic surged, New York’s Black and Brown were the hardest hit by poverty and unemployment and the same communities were and continue to be disproportionately impacted by gun violence.¹²

At New Yorkers Against Gun Violence, we work around the clock to ensure that we are doing our best to implement comprehensive solutions to reduce shootings and address the national gun trafficking crisis plaguing New Yorkers. Our gun violence prevention program for schools, ReACTION, is delivered to Black and Brown youth between the ages of 15-18 who are disproportionately impacted by the national gun trafficking crisis. The program is led by credible instructors from the communities we serve who work hand-in-hand with our social

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Glazer, Elizabeth, “Shifting the Center of Gravity: How Civic Life Can Create Safety,” *Vital City*, March 2, 2022. <https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/articles/civic-life-can-create-safety>. Accessed April 15, 2023.

¹⁰ Bailey *et al.*, “Structural Racism and Health Inequities in the USA: Evidence and Interventions,” *The Lancet*, April 8, 2017, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(17\)30569-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(17)30569-X/fulltext). Accessed April 15, 2023.

¹¹ Chapman, Ben, “New York City’s Shooting Surge Hit Black and Brown Communities Hardest,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 20, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-citys-shooting-surge-hit-black-and-hispanic-communities-hardest-11609074001>. Accessed April 15, 2023.

¹² *Ibid.*

worker. Together, our team provides social emotional support to youth victims of gun violence, their families, teachers, school administrators, and communities. A research evaluation of ReACTION determined that after participating in the program, students gained knowledge about the gun violence crisis and evidence-based solutions, were less likely to pick up guns, and were more likely to turn to a teacher or peer if they were experiencing a crisis.

NYAGV also provides trauma support to victims and schools in the aftermath of a shooting and helps victims access the state’s victim compensation fund to cover funeral expenses, hospital bills, and other burdensome costs. We partner with community violence intervention and interruption organizations, local and national leaders and lawmakers, faith leaders, victims rights organizations, prosecutors and law enforcement.

After the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, all cities—not just New York—experienced a surge in gun violence and crime. The pandemic caused unemployment, it caused a mental health crisis, more desperation and fear, more gun carrying, crimes of poverty, and violence. However, as more resources are put back into the communities suffering the most, public safety circumstances in New York City are improving. In the last 12 months, shootings and murder are down in all 5 Boroughs, including Manhattan.¹³ Crimes unrelated to guns are also going down in Manhattan and across the city.¹⁴

Yet, there is more that must be done to keep this city safe and even one victim of gun violence is one too many. To make a significant change, we need bipartisan support in Congress to fight violent crime and make our communities safer. Congress can combat the national gun trafficking crisis plaguing New York City and the state by passing federal gun reform laws that are modeled after New York State’s. We need to close loopholes in the federal background check system, protect victims and survivors of domestic violence, strengthen extreme risk protection order laws, promote safe storage laws, crack down on ghost guns and hold rogue, reckless gun dealers accountable. Our federal, state, and local governments need to invest more

¹³ “NYPD Announces Citywide Crime Statistics for March 2023,” City Of New York / New York Police Department,” April 6, 2023. <https://www.nyc.gov/site/nypd/news/p00077/nypd-citywide-crime-statistics-march-2023>. Accessed April 15, 2023.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

in community violence intervention and prevention programs, invest more in housing, healthcare, and education. Our state and our cities need more funding for victim services. And Congress must support and fund federal law enforcement efforts to investigate gun crimes and hold the highest drivers of crime and gun trafficking accountable.

New Yorkers—and all Americans, from Buffalo to Nashville to Louisville to Orlando to Uvalde to Parkland to Pittsburgh to Charleston to Highland Park to Newtown to Columbine – and every place in between – deserve to go to school, to the park, to their office, to a concert, to a grocery store, to their house of worship, or to celebrate this nation’s independence – without the real and present fear of gun violence. Our children, and our children’s children have the right to be safe and we need federal leadership to stand up for us and protect us.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.