



TESTIMONY OF MAYOR BYRON W. BROWN
CITY OF BUFFALO, NEW YORK
HOUSE FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

Chairman Green, Ranking Member Emmer, and Members of the House Financial Services Committee, I am honored to be here today to discuss the harmful impact of mass shootings on communities, local economies, and economic growth.

On Saturday May 14th 2022, the unthinkable happened in Buffalo, New York. Our family members, friends and neighbors were simply going about their business, grocery shopping when without warning, they were interrupted by deadly gunfire. An outsider opened fire and killed 10 innocent people and injured three others. It was a moment that changed our community forever. 52 days after the devastating shooting, we reopened the Tops Supermarket. However, nothing we do will ever repair the heartache for the families who lost their loved ones, and who continue to suffer. But we will always stand united with them. In the City of Good Neighbors, we are a loving and resilient community, a community that will always remember. We will never forget.

This horrific tragedy highlighted many issues that have impacted our community and black and brown communities nationwide. Across our country we have seen over a century of underfunding by the federal government in black and brown neighborhoods. This has led to unacceptable increases in gun violence, segregation, crime, poor health outcomes, and generational poverty. These factors made Buffalo a target for the May 14 shooter.

Every mass shooting has a significant economic impact. However, the mass shooting in Buffalo was different. It was an act of domestic terrorism fueled by racism and white supremacy. This

was perceived to be not only an attack on Black Buffalo, but an attack on Black America. In just the two weeks after the shooting, City Departments spent over \$500,000 of unbudgeted dollars on overtime and other related services. That amount has continued to significantly increase as City government continues to play a vital role in our community's healing process and public safety needs.

Gun violence has a lasting and negative impact on survivors and experiencing these events in childhood has a lifelong impact on the psychological well-being and labor market participation of those involved. The May 14 shooting in Buffalo will impact an entire generation of children. This event has the potential to harm Buffalo's already economically disadvantaged black community. It may drive growing gaps in cognitive and non-cognitive skills, accelerate a cycle that leads to low socioeconomic mobility and further grow inequality. We must do whatever we can to combat this and provide the East Buffalo community with the funding for services such as counseling, educational enrichment, and lost wages, as well as additional supports to ensure an equitable starting point in life.

According to a 2017 study by the Urban Institute - A Neighborhood-Level Analysis of the Economic Impact of Gun Violence, surges in gun violence can significantly reduce the growth of new retail and service businesses and slow home value appreciation. Higher levels of neighborhood gun violence can be associated with fewer retail and service establishments and fewer new jobs.

A 2021 Brookings Institute Study found that the best way to address place-based drivers of violence is with investments in the place's economic health, built environment conditions, social environment, and civic infrastructure. To combat that, my administration has taken an aggressive approach in developing programs for small businesses, workforce training, economic development and infrastructure investment in the areas that have seen this historic disinvestment. In East Buffalo, and in partnership with County, State, and Federal governments, we are bolstering our prioritization of funding improvements to infrastructure in streets, sidewalks, water, sewer, parks, community centers, and affordable housing.

I worked to open the Tops Supermarket when I was a city council member to help my community have access to fresh foods. In the aftermath of the shooting, my administration supported agencies to provide fresh and cooked food, facilitated food donations through FeedMore and World Central Kitchen, and partnered with ridesharing services to offer free rides for residents of the 14208 and 14209 zip codes who needed to access a grocery store while the market was closed. Thankfully, we worked with Tops to reopen the grocery store on July 15th and continue to provide East Buffalo with a high-quality grocery store that provides healthy options for the community.

We know there are still many needs to be addressed and the City of Buffalo remains committed to identifying and addressing these issues especially in East Buffalo. As we continue to mourn and heal from this tragedy, we will keep each other lifted in prayer. We must never forget this tragic event as we move forward and work towards a more peaceful and equitable society.

I applaud President Biden and the bipartisan group of members of Congress for supporting the Safer Communities Act. While, this law will save lives, it doesn't go far enough. I urge you to work with the Biden Administration on reinstating an assault weapons ban. Assault weapons are exceptionally deadly firearms that are commonplace in mass shootings. They are generally capable of firing far more bullets, far faster than manual-action hunting rifles. An assault weapons ban may have prevented the May 14th massacre. I also urge you to ensure that long ignored and underfunded black and brown communities like East Buffalo have the funding and supports available to ensure we recover from this tragedy and prevent and treat the trauma of violence that has held back communities of color for generations. In addition, anti-black hate crime legislation must also be passed to address white supremacy and remove these hateful ideologies from our society. Again, thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss this important matter and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.