



Testimony of Sarah Burd-Sharps
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Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations Hearing on
Thoughts and Prayers Are Not Enough:
How Mass Shootings Harm Communities, Local Economies, and Growth

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Good afternoon, Chair Green, Ranking Member Emmer, 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.

The devastating mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, two months ago resulted in 19 children and 2 teachers fatally shot and over a dozen others injured. This one horrific incident of gun violence left in its wake dozens of shattered families, children who don't want to return to school, and a traumatized community. 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 this cost for families and survivors.

But examining the serious economic consequences of gun violence is essential as well 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.

The economic consequences of the Robb Elementary School shooting are an estimated \$244.2 million dollars, of which \$10.2 million is borne by taxpayers.¹ This is millions in taxpayer dollars that could instead be invested in essential public goods like education, workforce development, and in building healthier, safer, more sustainable communities.

With tragic and numbing regularity in the United States, 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.² Today's focus is on mass shootings—of which there were 27 over the course of 2021

¹ Costs estimated from Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Calculate the Economic Cost of Gun Violence," accessed July 14, 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/economic-cost-calculator/>.

² Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "EveryStat: United States," accessed July 2022, <https://everystat.org/>.



in which four or more people were killed. These shootings resulted in 136 fatalities.³ But I want to be clear, mass shootings, while devastating, costly, and fear-inducing far beyond the location where they occur, make up less than 1 percent of all gun deaths and injuries.⁴

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

To garner an understanding of the economic cost of gun violence, 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 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 US Department of Health and Human Services, as well as hospital records from state governments and hospital associations, and extensive peer-reviewed research that establishes costs for police investigations, court salaries, incarceration, mental health services, and more.⁵

We found that the unrelenting epidemic of gun violence has an economic consequence to our nation of \$557 billion annually.⁶ To put that into perspective, that works out to the equivalent of 2.6 percent of our gross domestic product⁷ 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.⁸ That’s nearly \$35 million tax dollars each day that could instead help to support secure firearms storage awareness campaigns, local community violence intervention programs, and other efforts that research shows can prevent this violence from occurring in the first place.

³ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, “Mass Shootings in America,” accessed July 14, 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/mass-shootings-in-america/>. Everytown defines a mass shooting as an incident in which four or more people were killed, excluding the shooter.

⁴ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, “Mass Shootings in America,” accessed July 14, 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/mass-shootings-in-america/>.

⁵ 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/>.

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

⁷ 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>.

⁸ 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.



This \$557 billion is a conservative estimate. It represents the lifetime costs associated with gun violence starting at the scene of a shooting, continuing on to the long-term health care and criminal justice costs plus losses to workers and employers. And it includes estimates for the quality of life lost for the suffering and lost well-being of a victim and their family due to gun death and injury.⁹

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 are afraid to go 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 economic consequences in the following basic areas:

- \$2.8 billion in medical costs (both out-of-pocket from families, employer-covered costs, plus government programs);
- \$11.0 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
- \$489.1 billion in quality-of-life costs.¹⁰

The annual cost for overall gun violence in the United States is \$1,698 for every resident, combining 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.¹¹

⁹ 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/>.

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

¹¹ Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund, "The Economic Cost of Gun Violence," July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>.



For example, Mississippi has long been challenged by high levels of gun violence.¹² And it has the weakest gun laws in the country.¹³ 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.¹⁴ This is an incredibly high burden for Mississippians.

On the other hand, in Massachusetts—which has the lowest rate of gun deaths¹⁵ and some of the strongest gun laws in the nation¹⁶—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,¹⁷ allowing the state and its residents to allocate far more dollars to beneficial and productive investments.

After each of these crushing mass carnage events, the discussion turns to solutions. Let's be clear: the United States is not the only country with mental illness, domestic violence, video games, or hate-fueled ideologies. But our gun death rate is 13 times higher than our peer high-income countries.¹⁸ And our homicide rate is 26 times higher.¹⁹ The chief difference is easy access to guns. Even within the US, states with stronger gun laws and lower gun ownership rates have lower rates of mass shootings.²⁰

While we are so grateful for the actions Congress took recently to address gun violence, there is still much more we can do, and there is no time to waste. In the mass shootings since 2018 that killed at least 10 people, approximately half were committed by a shooter who was under 21 years old.²¹ The law has long acknowledged that people under 21 years old are a high risk population by prohibiting people under 21 from buying handguns at gun dealers and prohibiting handgun possession by people under 18. And Congress recently passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act which requires purchasers under 21 to submit to an enhanced background check. The Senate should follow the House's lead and pass legislation to raise the age to purchase firearms to age 21 and require background checks on all gun sales. Further, mass

¹² Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "EveryStat: Mississippi," accessed July 2022, <https://everystat.org/#Mississippi>.

¹³ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Everytown Gun Law Rankings," accessed July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/rankings/>.

¹⁴ Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund, "The Economic Cost of Gun Violence," July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>.

¹⁵ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "EveryStat: Massachusetts," <https://everystat.org/#Massachusetts>.

¹⁶ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Everytown Gun Law Rankings," accessed July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/rankings/>.

¹⁷ Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund, "The Economic Cost of Gun Violence," July 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>.

¹⁸ Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun deaths by country (2015 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).

¹⁹ Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun homicides by country (2013 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).

²⁰ Paul M. Reaping et al., "State Gun Laws, Gun Ownership, and Mass Shootings in the US: Cross Sectional Time Series," *BMJ* 364 (2019): I542, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.I542>.

²¹ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Mass Shootings in America," accessed July 14, 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/mass-shootings-in-america/>.



shooters often display warning signs.²² Extreme Risk laws that provide a process to temporarily remove guns from people exhibiting warning signs are in place in 19 states and have successfully been used to prevent mass shootings and other types of gun violence.²³ While Congress recently included hundreds of millions of dollars for states to implement Extreme Risk laws in the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the Senate should also pass the Federal Extreme Risk Protection Order Act that recently passed the House.

Our research clearly shows we are spending precious funds on an epidemic that brings nothing of benefit and plenty of heartbreak and shattered lives. We place ourselves at a severe economic disadvantage in the globally competitive economy with these enormous outlays.

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

Thank you again, Chair Green, Ranking Member Emmer, and members of the Committee, for allowing me to testify today. I look forward to your questions.

²² Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, “Mass Shootings in America,” accessed July 14, 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/mass-shootings-in-america/>.

²³ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, “Extreme Risk Laws Save Lives,” December 29, 2021, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/extreme-risk-laws-save-lives/>; Garen J. Wintemute et al., “Extreme Risk Protection Orders Intended to Prevent Mass Shootings,” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 171, no. 9 (2019): 655–58, <https://doi.org/10.7326/M19-2162>.