



March 23, 2021

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Hearing on Constitutional and Common Sense Steps to Reduce Gun Violence

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley:

The Atlanta mass shooting is the latest tragic example of America's gun violence crisis. The sad reality is that everyday gun violence has also continued to increase this past year and neither public narratives nor research focus enough on the fact that suicides comprise the majority of these deaths, or that community gun violence disproportionately impacts communities of color. If we're serious about tackling gun violence, these issues will require far more study and action.

For decades, basic questions about how to prevent gun violence have gone unresearched. We don't know where the guns used to commit shootings come from, for instance, or which laws and policies are effective at curbing violence. Exacerbating this problem is the complete absence of a data infrastructure. Either data on gun violence is lacking, data collection systems are incomplete, or the data is inaccessible.

We don't have the data or answers we need because the federal government—our country's biggest source of research funding—has significantly underinvested in this topic. Gun violence is one of the leading causes of death in America. Yet according to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, we spend \$100 million less *per year researching* the questions surrounding it than on public health issues that kill a similar number of people, such as sepsis and poisonings (Stark and Shah 2017).

As any research expert will tell you, answering crucial questions about how to prevent an epidemic requires good data and robust research. We need a national data collection effort and a rigorous gun violence research program: efforts only the federal government is in a position to support.

In 2019, Congress took a critical first step in appropriating \$25 million in research for the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study gun violence. It was the first significant investment in gun violence research in two decades—however, there is much more to be done if we're going to take gun violence as the serious epidemic that it is.

As a country, we have conversation after conversation about the scourge of gun violence and our need to address it, but for too long, our actions haven't matched our words. For too long, our country has allowed this significant public health and safety crisis to continue unencumbered, without supplying funding anywhere near the scale needed to match the size of the challenge.

We need our federal government to continue to take a leadership role on this issue. The time to begin a robust research and data collection program was decades ago, but as soon as possible is the next best option. Supporting data and research on gun violence is essential to saving lives.

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