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Statement of David O. Brown, Superintendent of Police, Chicago Police Department

before the

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“Combating Gun Trafficking and Reducing Violence in Chicago”

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Chairman Durbin and Members of the Committee: thank you for inviting me to today’s hearing on combating gun trafficking and reducing violence in Chicago. I would like to start by thanking Senator Durbin for his dedicated leadership here in the City of Chicago and across the State of Illinois. Today’s hearing is only one example of his unyielding support for the Chicago Police Department and the selfless men and women who don the uniform throughout the State of Illinois. Whether it is meeting with officers on the beat or meeting with lawmakers on Capitol Hill, we see his advocacy for law enforcement and commitment to making change. I also want to thank President Biden for his steadfast support of law enforcement during what is undoubtedly one of the most challenging times to be a police officer in the nation’s history. Along with several law enforcement and public safety advocates, I met with President Biden at the White House last summer to discuss ways to strengthen the federal and local partnership to curtail gun trafficking and the violence it brings to too many communities across the country. While our partnership is as healthy as ever, we welcome more coordination and resources to make the most significant difference possible.

I am sure we could all list many important reasons for being here today. But the fact remains there are none more important than 4-year-old Mychal Moultry or 7-year-old Jaslyn Adams, 71-year-old Woom Sing Tse, CPD’s own Officer Ella French or any of the other precious lives claimed by senseless gun violence. Mychal was getting his haircut, Jaslyn was at a fast-food restaurant, Mr. Tse was simply walking to get the morning newspaper, and Officer French was fearlessly apprehending a suspect.

In every instance, someone lost a loved one they will always remember, and the City of Chicago lost a neighbor that we must never forget. Their lives and their legacies are our calls to action. This hearing reminds us of that.

A vast majority of gun crimes are committed using illegal firearms. The firearm used to take the life of Officer French was obtained illegally in a straw purchase underscoring the absolute urgency for smart legislation and strategic prosecution. If convicted, that straw purchaser faces no minimum sentence. We need legislation focused on protecting our communities by doing everything possible to keep firearms out of the hands of individuals who should not have them. And collaboration across federal, state, and local governments aimed at violence prevention because we will not merely arrest or prosecute our way to safer communities.

Over the course of 2021, 93% of all murders in the City of Chicago were caused by guns. This year we also saw 760 people murdered and remain on pace to recover more than 12,000 guns by the end of year. And while burglaries and robberies are at historic lows, we saw a significant uptick in “ghost guns,” which cannot be traced. In 2020, we recovered 130 ghost guns and this year, we’ve already recovered 430.

Combating gun trafficking and reducing violence requires evidence-informed, smart solutions from everyone at every level. On the federal level, I am proud the Chicago Police Department maintains crucial working relationships with federal partners such as the FBI, DEA, and ATF. Earlier this year in July, CPD created its first ever Gun Investigation Teams to target and eliminate the illegal pipeline of firearms flowing through Chicagoland. In one of the most successful operations to date, the Gun Investigations Team spearheaded an effort that resulted in four individuals being charged federally. The team also recovered 84 firearms and several “switcher” devices, which turn semi-automatic handguns into fully automatic submachine pistols with ammunition and silencers. Chicago’s ATF Task Force Officers (TFOs) were instrumental when the investigation crossed state lines into St. Louis, Missouri.

Yet there is currently no federal law against gun trafficking. Federal sentencing guidelines must reflect the severity of the national gun violence problem: harsher penalties for straw purchasers and gun traffickers will send a message. The problem of gun violence in Chicago is not a local problem but a national problem. Local gun violence in a hub for transportation, culture, and commerce undoubtedly impacts national security because gun trafficking is intrinsically cross-jurisdictional.

On a local level, the City of Chicago’s efforts have included supporting programs for violence prevention and reduction with \$52 million in funding through our annual budget. In June, 2020, Mayor Lightfoot launched *Our City, Our Safety: A Comprehensive Approach to Reduce Violence in Chicago*. *Our City, Our Safety* is a public health approach to community safety that is community-centered, data-driven, and evidence-based. This past summer the men and women of CPD – my brothers and sisters in blue – worked with every part of local government as well as with residents and community leaders to implement the Mayor’s Summer Safety Strategy. Using violent crime data over the previous three summers (2018, 2019, & 2020), CPD identified 15 police beats, which had experienced the highest levels of violence. After dividing the beats into four safety zones – two on the South side and two on the West side, we got to work. We flooded the zones with police and other resources including both wraparound city and community-based services. In this whole-of-government strategy, nearly every city department and sister agency participated including the Mayor’s Office and Department of Family and Support Services, the Park District and the Chicago Public Library, Chicago Public Schools and City Colleges with the Office of Emergency Management and more. We targeted resources to specific areas of high need. We used our data and input and collaboration from the community to guide and deploy police personnel ensuring proactive engagement such as foot patrols and community safety walks.

During this time, the City also dedicated \$85 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and bond funding to bolster violence prevention programming over the next three years. As a result, the Community Safety Coordination Center is funding and supporting violence reduction efforts in those 15 priority communities where some of those high-violence beats are located. This work is bolstered by an almost \$400 million investment to support the comprehensive strategies identified in *Our City, Our Safety*.

Continuing this momentum with the right resources and strategies is vital. In addition to finally taking aim at gun trafficking with robust federal laws, I ask that you fund local law enforcement efforts. The allocation of funds for basic investigative and lab equipment, at least 30 additional fully-funded ATF TFOs, and additional fully-funded FBI, DEA, and Homeland Security Investigations TFOs would be invaluable. We need federal help on the ground for large scale efforts to take down the criminal networks driving violence. Fully funded

TFOs reduce the drain on limited federal resources by splitting the costs with CPD and provide CPD officers the ability to go after interstate gun trafficking offenders. The tracing and testing of guns in Chicago is of national importance since we know these guns cross state lines. A team of additional Assistant US Attorneys, dedicated to prosecuting criminal networks in the highest crime districts, is necessary to follow through on the work done by police. With the right resources, safety won't have to be a goal; it will be the standard.

Thank you again to Senator Durbin for the opportunity to speak here today, and to all of you for your leadership and attention on this urgent matter. I look forward to taking your questions.