



# Department of Justice

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**STATEMENT OF**

**JOHN LAUSCH  
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS  
CHICAGO, IL**

**BEFORE THE**

**COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**AT A HEARING ENTITLED**

**“COMBATING GUN TRAFFICKING AND REDUCING VIOLENCE IN CHICAGO”**

**PRESENTED**

**DECEMBER 13, 2021**

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Good morning. Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss this very important issue. I have had the privilege to serve as the United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois for the past four years. The district covers 18 counties, with a total population of approximately nine million people. There are approximately 150 Assistant U.S. Attorneys in Chicago and Rockford, and another 150 support staff. I myself was an AUSA in this district from 1999 to 2010. During that time, I worked as Deputy Chief in the Narcotics & Gangs Section, and I served as the office’s Violent Crime Coordinator, leading the District’s Anti-Gang and Project Safe Neighborhoods programs.

Throughout my tenure, I have had many conversations about what is driving violence in Chicago. The answer is never a simple one. The causes of violent crime are many and varied, and can change over time – and that holds true for Chicago as well. Right now, Chicago, like many places throughout the country, is seeing increases in youth violence, and violent criminals emboldened to a degree that we have not seen in some time. They are emboldened to carry guns and to use them.

According to Chicago Police Department data, through Dec. 5, there were 756 murders in Chicago, which is 4% more than last year at this time, and 3,347 reported shooting incidents, which is up 9%. Homicides in Chicago hit a several-decade low in 2014, when the city recorded 426 homicides. Troublingly, Chicago has significantly exceeded this level of homicides in every year since 2014, and exceeded it by more than 80% in several years, including 2016, 2020, and likely in 2021.

Federal law enforcement's role in fighting violent crime is primarily to support the work of the brave men and women in State and local police departments, who comprise 85% of law enforcement officers in the country. We are fortunate to have strong partnerships with the Chicago Police Department and other State and local law enforcement throughout northern Illinois. Our violent crime reduction efforts are part of the Department of Justice's [Project Safe Neighborhoods \("PSN"\) initiative](#). PSN is a promising, evidence-based program aimed at reducing violent crime. Through PSN, a broad spectrum of stakeholders works together to identify the most pressing violent crime problems in the community and develops comprehensive solutions to address them. As part of this strategy, PSN focuses enforcement efforts on the most violent offenders and partners with locally based prevention and reentry programs for lasting reductions in crime.

In the last three fiscal years in which they have been awarded, our District's PSN grants have provided valuable support to the program by funding strategic enforcement initiatives, academic research, community outreach, and crime prevention and disruption programs. For example, PSN grants helped the Rockford Police Department to purchase investigative technology, hire an information technology specialist, and pay their officers and analysts for

working overtime, all to identify, investigate and prosecute those committing gun violence in the city. Recent PSN grants are funding research and other data collection, process evaluation, and output reporting projects by the University of Chicago and Loyola University of Chicago, and are also being used to support promising crime prevention programs in both Chicago and Rockford. For example, in Chicago, PSN funding supports Choose to Change, a program that engages youth heavily impacted by violence and trauma by connecting them with intensive advocate and wraparound supports along with trauma-informed therapy to help them live safe and successful lives. In Rockford, PSN funding supports the Family Peace Center and their sister program, Camp Hope, which serves youth, ages 7 to 17, who have been impacted by domestic violence and sexual abuse.

As I noted earlier, violent crime reduction is addressed primarily at the local level by local law enforcement and local government and community programs that work to prevent it. Indeed, most violent crime does not violate federal law; for example, there is no federal statute criminalizing murder absent special circumstances (such as in a uniquely federal jurisdiction, or when committed against an officer of the federal government), or unless those murders are committed as part of a larger criminal enterprise. That is why the most effective use of federal law enforcement resources against violent crime is as a supplement to and in support of those critical local efforts, and why, here in Chicago, our federal efforts focus on investigating and prosecuting gangs and other groups who work in concert to commit crimes involving violence, including murders and shootings, robberies, carjackings, drug trafficking, and firearms trafficking. These include prosecutions of members of the large, traditional gangs that have a long history of violence in Chicago, as well as smaller groups, such as robbery and carjacking crews. These investigations typically involve

multiple agencies working alongside local police. Federal charges often include federal racketeering and conspiracy laws that are specifically tailored to address crimes by individuals acting in concert with others to advance the group's interests.

We supplement these larger investigations with individual prosecutions of violent offenders who are driving crime and violence in Chicago's neighborhoods. Typically, these prosecutions rely on the federal law criminalizing the unlawful possession of firearms by convicted felons. During my time as U.S. Attorney, we created a [Gun Crimes Prosecution Team](#) to enhance our efforts to stem illegal firearm possession and the violence that follows in the Chicago neighborhoods most affected by gun violence. Working collaboratively with federal and local law enforcement, the Gun Crimes Prosecution Team focuses on charging dangerous gun offenders quickly after arrest in the neighborhoods most in need, with the goal of disrupting pervasive cycles of violence.

Straw purchasers and firearms traffickers enable the unlawful possession of firearms and the violence that follows. This summer, the Department announced the formation of five cross-jurisdictional strike forces, one of which is based in Chicago, to disrupt illegal firearms trafficking. As part of the [Chicago strike force](#), the U.S. Attorney's Office collaborates with ATF and other federal, State, and local law enforcement partners in our district and across the country to help stem the supply of illegally trafficked firearms and to identify patterns, leads, and potential suspects in violent gun crimes. The Chicago strike force is enhancing our longstanding efforts to hold accountable those individuals or groups who illegally traffic firearms into Chicago.

Public safety in our district also continues to be threatened by the illegal trafficking of drugs, including heroin and other opioids, cocaine, and, increasingly, fentanyl. Not only are these drugs highly destructive to communities and lethal to individuals, but they continue to contribute to

violence in Chicago and elsewhere. Our office targets the suppliers who bring these drugs into Illinois from other States or countries or distribute them in wholesale quantities, with a focus on large organizations that often use violence or threats of violence to protect and promote their business. We also investigate and prosecute gangs and other groups of individuals who control the retail drug trade within our cities, with a priority focus on groups that regularly employ guns and use violence to defend and expand their drug territory.

Pre-trial detention and prison sentences are often essential to protecting victims and witnesses in these cases and preventing additional violence. When appropriate, our office will seek pre-trial detention for those defendants who pose a danger to the community, as this takes them off the streets immediately and reduces the threat they pose to commit further harm until their cases are resolved. Such pre-trial detention of dangerous and often violent individuals who have been charged with a crime is lawful and specifically authorized by the Bail Reform Act of 1984 and subsequent amendments, which explicitly preserve the presumption of innocence. And we continue to pursue appropriate and proportional prison sentences to prevent dangerous individuals from continuing to cause violence in their communities and to put emboldened criminals on notice that they face serious federal consequences for their violent crimes.

I would be happy to discuss specific examples of our violent crime prosecutions, but obviously my time here today is limited and I'm sure you have questions to ask. For case examples, I would refer you to a news release our office issued on Nov. 29, entitled, "Update on Federal Prosecutions and Ongoing Strategies to Combat Violent Crime in Chicago." The release is available on our [website](#). We update this release twice per year, and the prior releases are also available on our website.

While our primary mission is to prosecute violations of federal law, our PSN program also involves violence-prevention initiatives designed to reduce the cycle of violence and prevent additional crimes. Members of my office have participated in offender notification meetings and youth outreach forums, which provide an opportunity for individuals who have been convicted of a criminal offense to make an informed choice not to engage in further criminal activity. Research has found that the forums in Chicago have a positive influence on the offenders' perception of law enforcement and help create an understanding that criminal activity results in a higher risk to return to prison. We are proud to partner in this effort with CPD, the Illinois Department of Corrections, the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, the University of Chicago Crime Lab, and several social service agencies and other community partners.

Thank you again for inviting me today. I would be happy to answer any questions.