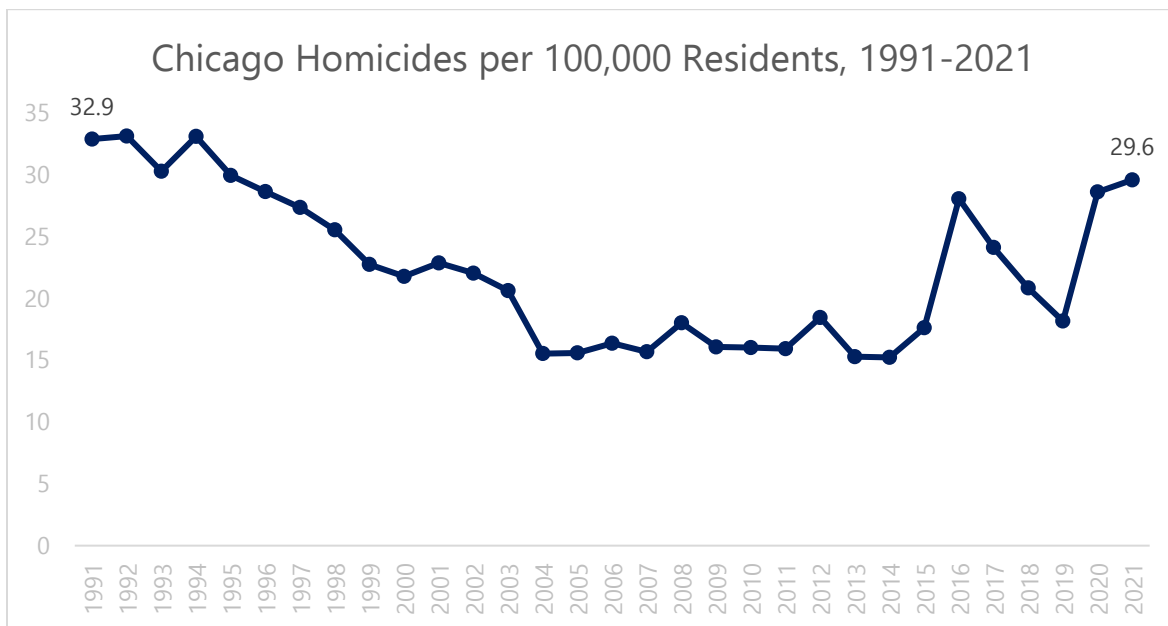


Testimony of Roseanna Ander
 Senate Committee on the Judiciary
 December 13, 2021

Good morning, Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and members of the Committee. My name is Roseanna Ander and I am the Executive Director of the University of Chicago Crime Lab, a non-profit, non-partisan research center that designs, tests, and scales data-driven innovations to reduce gun violence and improve our criminal justice system. We generate evidence about how the public sector can better address these two issues and then design solutions based on that evidence. Thank you for the opportunity to share some of our findings before this esteemed committee.

Gun violence started surging across America in 2020. Between 2019 and 2020, there was the largest one-year rise in the homicide rate in fifty years, and that increase spilled over into 2021. At least 12 major U.S. cities across America have set homicide records this year.¹

Chicago has been hit particularly hard. The city is on track to end the year with around 800 homicides, a 3% increase relative to 2020 and, because of the surge seen in 2020, a 60% increase relative to 2019.²

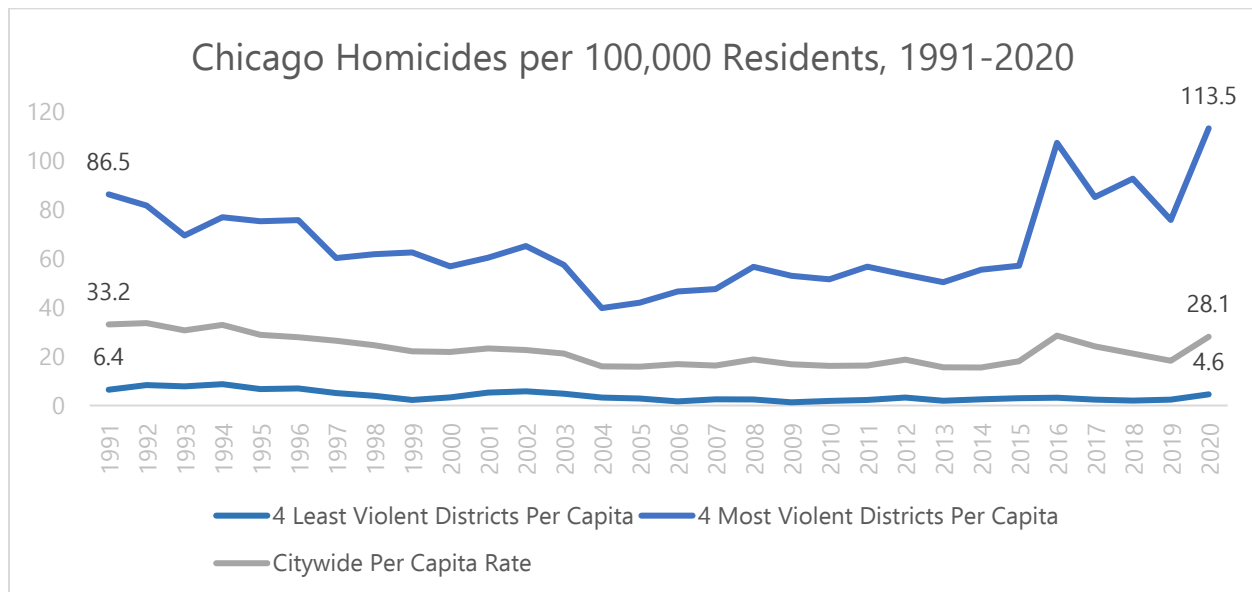


And for every family that loses a loved one to gun violence we know there are four to five times as many victims who suffer non-fatal, but often life-altering, lifelong injuries. But those numbers don't tell the full story. The data show there are significant disparities that we need to improve: In 2020, the gun homicide rate in Chicago's four most violent police districts was 25 times higher than in the four least violent police

¹ Allen, Mike. "'Worse than a War Zone': 12 Major U.S. Cities Set Homicide Records This Year." Axios. December 08, 2021. Accessed December 12, 2021. <https://www.axios.com/homicide-cities-crime-police-09d3c523-adb1-4f7d-8d80-5c978c6192b5.html>.

² According to the City of Chicago's [Violence Reduction Dashboard](#), there were 772 homicides in 2020 and 498 homicides in 2019. We estimate the city is currently on track for 794-798 homicides by the end of the year.

districts. In 1991, the rate was 13 times higher – meaning since the '90s, the safety gap has doubled in Chicago's most vulnerable neighborhoods. This disproportionately impacts Black residents.



University of Chicago Crime Lab analysis of Chicago Police Department data

The ripple effect of gun violence goes far beyond the direct victims and even their immediate families. Just to offer one example, Princeton sociologist Pat Sharkey, an affiliate with the Crime Lab, has shown that children who take standardized tests following a homicide occurring down the street where they live test as though they have missed two years of school.³ Multiply that day in and day out in our nation. What we are doing to our children and our nation's future demands urgent action.

Many are framing this as a "crime crisis," but that description does not accurately reflect what's happening in America. Several types of violent crimes are down, including robbery and rape, and property crime has continued its years-long decline.⁴ We don't have a crime crisis. We have a gun violence crisis.

I am encouraged that so many of the components of the Build Back Better bill are backed by data and research that suggests they would help save lives in 2022 and beyond. But first, it's important to understand what gun violence in America really looks like. There's an idea that most gun violence is "rational" or pre-planned and thought through—that it's committed by bad people and the only thing we can do to address gun violence is either punish people after the fact or threaten severe punishment in the hopes of deterring it. But in fact, the vast majority of murders in America are not motivated by money, robberies, or wars between gangs over drug turf. They are most often the result of an argument that spins out of control. Here in Chicago, fully three-quarters of shootings stem from an altercation that happens to take place within reach of a gun.⁵

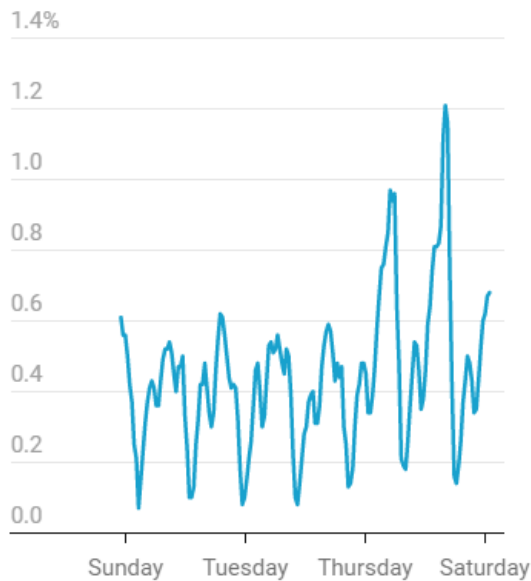
³ Sharkey, P. "The Acute Effect of Local Homicides on Children's Cognitive Performance." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107, no. 26 (June 29, 2010): 11733-1738. doi:10.1073/pnas.1000690107.

⁴ "FBI Releases 2020 Crime Statistics." FBI. September 27, 2021. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2020-crime-statistics>.

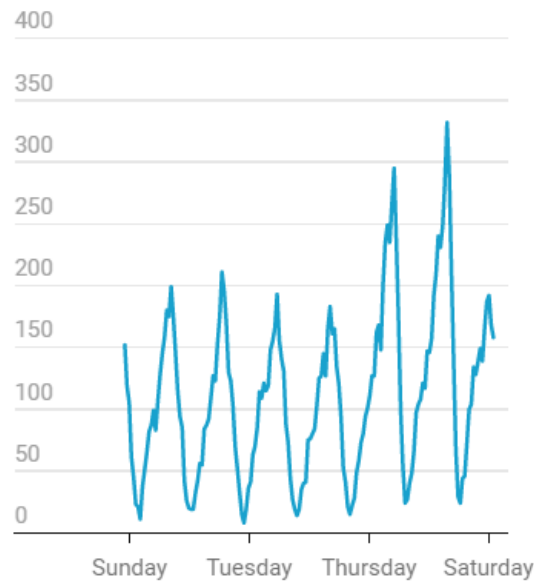
⁵ "2011 Murder Report" Chicago Police Department, May 25, 2012. <https://home.chicagopolice.org/2011-murder-report/>.

That means one way to reduce gun violence is to make the situations in which those arguments occur more forgiving. The best way to do that is to limit the widespread availability of illegal guns. By the Crime Lab's estimate, illegal gun carrying in Chicago increased by over 100% in 2020, driven largely by guns trafficked into Chicago, many from outside of Illinois.⁶ Without the presence of a gun, altercations would still happen, but they would be far less likely to result in death. That's why if Chicago, with its existing gun laws, were an island, the city would not have a gun violence crisis. But weaker laws at the federal level and in many neighboring states mean Chicago and Illinois bear the cost of others' policy choices.

Gun carrying rates, 2014-2020



Shooting Incidents, 2014-2020



University of Chicago Crime Lab analysis of Chicago Police Department data

Fair and effective policing is also critical to help de-escalate arguments and deter illegal gun carrying. But policing being "fair and effective" is key. Research shows that when the relationship between police and communities erodes, the public's willingness to report crimes declines, making people more likely to turn to self-enforcement and retaliation instead of the criminal justice system.⁷ Ineffective, overly aggressive policing also causes significant individual and societal harms that are disproportionately borne by communities of color, and in particular Black residents.

For too long, policymakers have viewed reducing gun violence and reforming the criminal justice system as inherently in tension. But to truly increase public safety, we must find solutions that do both. Reducing low-level arrests, particularly drug and misdemeanor arrests, while focusing more surgically on disrupting

⁶ Ludwig, Jens. "Data Points: Illegal Gun Carrying in Chicago Spiked in 2020 - and Deadly Violence Followed." *Chicago Tribune*. April 03, 2021. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-opinion-data-points-gun-carrying-crime-lab-20210403-5iz6blr6urhlji7hxwyjwrnhc4-htmlstory.html>.

⁷ Desmond, Matthew, Andrew V. Papachristos, and David S. Kirk. "Police violence and citizen crime reporting in the black community." *American Sociological Review* 81, no. 5 (2016): 857-876.

underground gun markets and illegal gun carrying are two such complementary efforts. But there are investments we can make right now that would also address the situations that lead to gun violence.

The Build Back Better bill currently being debated by Congress would help finance many of these data-driven and evidence-informed investments.

The bill includes \$5 billion in funding for Community Violence Intervention programs – or “CVI” programs – which help people deescalate stressful situations before they lead to violence. At the Crime Lab, we have conducted randomized controlled trials of several CVI programs that show enormous promise. Two of these are Choose to Change and Becoming A Man, both of which connect young people at risk of gun violence involvement with trauma-informed therapy and supports. Crime Lab researchers found that participation in BAM can cut violent crime arrests among youth in half and boost the high school graduation rates of participants by nearly 20 percent.⁸ Preliminary research of C2C shows a similar impact on participants’ violent crime involvement.⁹

Another CVI program, READI Chicago, reaches the men most at risk of gun violence involvement. Thirty-five percent of READI participants have previously been shot. 98% have been arrested at least once, with an average of 17 arrests.¹⁰ These are the men for whom our society provides no social safety net; men who other interventions historically struggle to reach. READI is changing that. Despite facing considerable barriers to participating, the majority of men offered READI do so, and they remain highly engaged throughout the program. While preliminary, our research has shown men who participated in READI have 79% fewer arrests for shootings and homicides.¹¹

The bill also includes other critical programs and reforms that would reduce gun violence. It incentivizes state and local zoning reforms and expands supports like Housing Choice Vouchers—helping to desegregate communities and allow families to live in higher opportunity neighborhoods. Similar programs have been highly effective in reducing gun violence involvement for participating families. For example, the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s “Moving to Opportunity” initiative helped families move from economically distressed neighborhoods to less distressed areas. As a result, violent crime arrests of teens in participating families fell by a staggering 50%.¹²

By expanding the Community Development Block Grant program, Build Back Better would also make many simple, relatively cheap investments that a growing body of research shows reduce gun violence – from improving vacant lots¹³ to expanding street lighting.¹⁴ By increasing foot traffic on streets, these

⁸ Heller, Sara B., Anuj K. Shah, Jonathan Guryan, Jens Ludwig, Sendhil Mullainathan, and Harold A. Pollack. "Thinking, fast and slow? Some field experiments to reduce crime and dropout in Chicago." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 132, no. 1 (2017): 1-54.

⁹ "Choose to Change: Your Mind, Your Game." Research Brief. University of Chicago Crime and Education Labs. February 2020.

¹⁰ "READI Chicago: A Community-Based Approach to Reducing Gun Violence." Research Brief. University of Chicago Crime Lab. September 2021.

¹¹ Id.

¹² Kling, Jeffrey R., Jens Ludwig, and Lawrence F. Katz. "Neighborhood effects on crime for female and male youth: Evidence from a randomized housing voucher experiment." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120, no. 1 (2005): 87-130.

¹³ Branas, Charles C., Eugenia South, Michelle C. Kondo, Bernadette C. Hohl, Philippe Bourgois, Douglas J. Wiebe, and John M. MacDonald. "Citywide cluster randomized trial to restore blighted vacant land and its effects on violence, crime, and fear." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 12 (2018): 2946-2951.

¹⁴ Chalfin, Aaron, Benjamin Hansen, Jason Lerner, and Lucie Parker. "Reducing crime through environmental design: Evidence from a randomized experiment of street lighting in New York City." *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* (2021): 1-31.



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Reducing Gun Violence**

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types of investments make it more likely that arguments will be de-escalated before they result in violence.

In short, there are solutions. The data show that by making situations more forgiving—which complements our efforts to improve policing—we can stem the tide of gun violence. That's what Build Back Better would help accomplish.

Thank you.