



NATIONAL POLICE FOUNDATION
Advancing Policing Through Innovation and Science

March 22, 2021

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator and Chair
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Durbin,

On behalf of the National Police Foundation, an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization dedicated to advancing policing through innovation and science, we submit this statement for the record in advance of the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on Constitutional and Common Sense Steps to Reduce Gun Violence on March 23, 2021.

The National Police Foundation has long supported and called for **universal background checks** for all firearm transfers. As we hear from police chiefs, sheriffs, and other public safety professionals around the United States about the very significant and concerning spikes in gun violence, at least one common theme emerges—*access to firearms*. We must take every reasonable step to prevent firearms from falling into the hands of those who are prohibited by law from possessing a firearm.

Addressing Violent Crime – Recommendations for Federal Policymakers

To further address violent crime and support the needs of local law enforcement in confronting it, the federal government plays a vital role in addition to its enforcement operations—to support state and local law enforcement. In 2017, the National Police Foundation conducted a nearly year-long assessment of the needs of major city law enforcement agencies in confronting violent crime. The report, [*Reducing Violent Crime In American Cities: An Opportunity To Lead, Evidence-Based Recommendations for Strengthening Federal-Local Partnerships while Enhancing Local Control of Violent Crime Strategies*](#) contains more than 25 recommendations for federal policy makers to consider. Although it has been more than four years since the report was published, the recommendations largely remain intact and unaddressed. Among the report's recommendations for federal support are:

- Establish violent crime as an ongoing (vs episodic) law enforcement priority.
- Develop innovative and more timely crime data systems and reporting programs at the national level.



- Require federal law enforcement agencies to collaborate with local law enforcement, exercising shared decision-making about local issues and co-production of public safety strategies.
- Strengthen the current system of budget planning and performance measurement across the federal law enforcement agencies by measuring performance and allocating resources based on the consistent use of evidence-based approaches versus outdated metrics that lead to higher rates of incarceration and overcriminalization.
- Ensure that federal law enforcement and support offices and bureaus within DOJ responsible for addressing violent crime are appropriately funded, supported and coordinated, and are able to focus on developing effective, meaningful responses to localized and significant violent crime problems.
- Designate one federal law enforcement agency with primary (but not exclusive) responsibility for confronting and reducing violent crime through a coordinated approach with other agencies.
- Realign federal law enforcement and public safety responsibilities to maximize staffing and resource usage across agencies.
- Increase the availability of new, flexible funding resources for state and local law enforcement agencies and criminal justice systems.
- Work collaboratively, in bi-partisan fashion, to increase federal funding for scientific gun violence research and ensuring that the results of this research inform the strategies each federal agency pursues.

This same study asked local agencies about the most important resources and tools they need to confront violent crime. The major city law enforcement agencies we surveyed in the study ranked access to tools and resources as essential in their efforts to reduce gun violence, citing the need for **ballistics imaging and crime gun tracing** above all other types of resources.

Lacking & Lagging Data Regarding Firearm Violence

The lack of timely information about firearm violence significantly limits a coordinated regional and national response. Further, information collected at the federal level often lacks the nuance or timeliness needed to make evidence-based policy decisions. In October of 2020, NORC at the University of Chicago, with the support of the philanthropic organization Arnold Ventures, published an extraordinarily important report, [*A Blueprint for a U.S. Firearms Data Infrastructure, Final Recommendations of the Expert Panel on Firearms Data Infrastructure*](#). As stated in the report, "The most enduring data infrastructure is one that is comprehensive, flexible, and nonpartisan. Nowhere is that data foundation more needed than in the realm of firearms violence—reliable data are a critical bridge to effective policymaking that improves



public safety by reducing the number of firearm accidents, suicides, homicides, and assaults." We urge the Committee to review this report and to ensure that the recommendations are considered and fully supported with federal resources.

Of particular importance, NORC and Arnold Ventures recently issued a [joint letter](#) calling for the reinstatement and expansion of the Firearm Inquiry Statistics (FIST) Program. This data collection, managed by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, has not issued a report since 2017. As such, policy makers are missing key data on the number of background checks performed each year for the transfer or sale of a firearm. We join them in calling for the reinstatement of this program and reporting.

Supporting Research on Crime-Involved Firearms

There is a critical need for more research to reveal and understand the full life cycle of crime-involved firearms and the dynamics that occur within the life cycle. In particular, we know little about how people come to possess firearms that are used in crimes. Understanding the pathways through which guns find their way to criminal involvement is critical to developing responsive law enforcement strategies. Detailed understanding of crime gun lifecycle is incomplete; it is both dated and limited in its geographic coverage. More detailed information is needed to understand the process by which individuals come into possession of firearms used in crimes. Crime-involved firearms are often used in multiple criminal events; research in this area would allow law enforcement agencies to break this cycle of violence.

Homemade and Other Unserialized Firearm Research

Homemade and other privately made and unserialized firearms are often produced from kits of firearm components that are not currently, prior to assembly, considered firearms under federal law. These kits require a minimal level of machining and assembly to produce an operational firearm. This process can be easily completed with simple instructions and templates provided by the kit manufacturer. The firearms completed with these kits are a particularly troubling public safety concern because they can be purchased with no background check and have no traceable identifiers – they are essentially untraceable. Addressing the challenges presented by privately made firearms will require several initiatives, possibly including a clarification of regulation or a legislative effort to update the definition of a firearm to include key components within the kits. The federal government should also develop a data capture process for ensuring that privately made and unserialized firearms involved in crimes are entered and tracked correctly in the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) or other systems as appropriate. At the local level, law enforcement agencies need additional guidance and training on recovering, documenting, and tracking recovered privately made and unserialized firearms. The National Police Foundation's ongoing research shows that the awareness and training related to these firearms varies considerably among agencies. Greater transparency with regarding to the extent to which such firearms are recovered and involved in crimes is needed from both the federal and local level.



Community-Based Responses to Gun Violence

As calls for policing reforms and alternative responses to community concerns continue, we note that there is little research to guide local policymakers as they consider alternatives to traditional police responses for certain types of calls for police service. We must know more about the most effective ways to shift responses and resources to community-based organizations to confront these challenges. In particular, we must understand not only what works in urban areas where gun violence is often concentrated but also in rural and suburban areas which also have a need to prevent gun violence but have nowhere near the resources of urban jurisdictions. Rural and other smaller jurisdictions may need greater adaptation of response models, which requires translational science to understand what is most effective. Rural and small communities may also require resources to create or augment other response mechanisms and services. If we cannot assist these communities in responding to calls for reform appropriately and responsibly, we will suffer as a result of the resource reductions and allocations taking place today in some communities.

Resources & Prioritization of Gun Trafficking

As the major city law enforcement agencies indicated in our 2017 study discussed earlier in this testimony, resources associated with confronting gun trafficking is vitally important. As Chicago officials have pointed out for years, interstate gun trafficking continues to pose a serious threat to public safety even in places with far-reaching gun policy protections. We urge the Committee to ensure that the Department of Justice's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) has ample and robust resources to address gun trafficking, including supporting state and local law enforcement priority resources needs (NIBIN, tracing, etc.) and continuing to partner with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) in support of Crime Gun Intelligence Centers (CGIC), an important gun violence reduction strategy. Another key factor in our collective success includes ATF's industry operations and the role of the firearms industry in ensuring that firearms aren't transferred to prohibited persons. It is vital that ATF is not required to shift resources away from industry oversight and engagement in order to address gun trafficking.

In closing, we applaud the Committee's focus on the alarming spikes in gun violence and on one of America's most chronic crisis—gun violence. We appreciate the Committee's leadership and the work of Committee Members and staff and respectfully request the Committee's full consideration of the recommendations above.

Sincerely,

Jim Burch
President
National Police Foundation