HEALING COMMUNITIES IN CRISIS

LIFESAVING SOLUTIONS TO THE URBAN GUN VIOLENCE EPIDEMIC

A collaboration of the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence and the PICO National Network.

smartgunlaws.org/healing-communities

LAW CENTER TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE
BECAUSE SMART GUN LAWS SAVE LIVES

PICO National Network
Unlocking the Power of People

WELCOME

The Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence is thrilled to team up with the PICO National Network to address the epidemic of urban gun violence in America.

Healing Communities in Crisis represents the culmination of a yearlong collaboration to bridge the gap between the policy and program strategies for ending one of the largest and most devasting facets of gun violence. Only by combining approaches—top-down, bottom-up, and everything in-between—can we begin to see true change in our cities.

Our hope is that *Healing Communities* will serve as a roadmap for activists, faith leaders, legislators, community members, and city officials as they work to fix a system that has failed so many Americans. No one should have to live in a neighborhood where the threat of gunfire is routine.

Sincerely,

Robyn Thomas
Executive Director
Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence

At the PICO National Network, we believe that the mass criminalization and incarceration of people of color, combined with a lack of meaningful opportunities, have contributed to a state of crisis in our country. This lack of opportunity is both a cause and a symptom of the horrific levels of gun violence that continue to devastate underserved black and brown neighborhoods in urban America.

This report is a wake-up call. We know, based on evidence and real-life experience, that it is possible to reduce gun violence without contributing to catastrophic levels of mass incarceration—and simultaneously improve police-community relationships.

Anyone who cares about social justice should become familiar with the programs and strategies outlined here. Together, we can create a better future.

Blessings,

Pastor Michael McBride
Director of Urban Strategies
PICO National Network

ABOUT

LAW CENTER TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE
BECAUSE SMART GUN LAWS SAVE LIVES

ABOUT THE LAW CENTER TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

smartgunlaws.org

Founded in the wake of the July 1, 1993, assault weapon massacre at 101 California Street in San Francisco that left eight dead and six wounded, the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence is now the premier resource for legal expertise and information regarding state and federal firearms laws. Made up of the foremost gun law attorneys in the nation, our staff tracks and analyzes firearms legislation in all 50 states, files amicus briefs in critical Second Amendment cases across the country, and works with lawmakers and advocates to craft and promote legislation that will reduce gun violence and save lives.

We regularly partner with other nonprofit organizations dedicated to combating the epidemic of gun violence in our country, and we invite you to explore our website, smartgunlaws.org, to learn more about our work and deepen your knowledge about gun laws in America.

PICO National Network
Unlocking the Power of People

ABOUT THE PICO NATIONAL NETWORK

piconetwork.org

PICO National Network is the largest grassroots, faith-based organizing network in the United States working to create innovative solutions to problems facing urban, suburban and rural communities. Since 1972 PICO has successfully worked to increase access to health care, improve public schools, make neighborhoods safer, build affordable housing, redevelop communities and revitalize democracy. Nonpartisan and multicultural, PICO provides an opportunity for people and congregations to translate their faith into action.

More than 40 different religious denominations and faith traditions are part of PICO. Currently, PICO works with more than 1,000 member institutions representing one million families in 150 cities and 17 states, as well as a growing international effort. Together we are lifting up a new vision for America that unites people across region, race, class, and religion.

LIVEFREE

ABOUT THE LIVE FREE CAMPAIGN

livefreeusa.org

Live Free is a campaign of the PICO National Network. It is a movement of faith-based organizations and congregations committed to addressing the causes of pervasive violence and crime in our communities. We believe that the mass criminalization and incarceration of people of color, coupled with the lack of meaningful and quality opportunities, have contributed to a state of crisis in our country.

Live Free is committed to dismantling the mass-criminalization of people of color by mobilizing the faith community to action using the voices of those closest to the pain in order to build communities where all of God's children can live free.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION
A CRISIS IN OUR CITIES

More than 117,000 people are shot in America annually.[1] That's enough to fill a small city—think Springfield, IL, Boulder, CO, Berkeley, CA—*every year.*

Young people are now more likely to die from gun violence than car accidents.[2] Horrific shootings dominate our headlines, and our gun death rates dwarf every other industrialized nation by orders of magnitude.

This is a crisis.

And nowhere is it more evident than in our cities.

Gun homicides in America are disproportionately concentrated in urban areas, particularly in impoverished and underserved minority communities.[3] Such neighborhoods are too often plagued by homicide rates on par with warzones.

As one mother in a high-crime area of Chicago put it, "At night you had to put your mattress on the floor because bullets would be coming through the windows. It was like Vietnam."[4] Except that in Vietnam, 58,000 Americans were killed over 20 years. Back home in 21st Century America, more than 60,000 people are killed by guns every two years, with many more suffering debilitating injuries.[5]

Young black men are especially vulnerable. Constituting just 6% of the US population, black men account for more than 50% of all gun homicides each year.[6] For black families in America, the chance of a male child dying from a gunshot wound is 62% higher than dying in a motor vehicle crash. That chance is even greater for families in poor, high-crime urban neighborhoods.[7]

The media has often neglected to tell this tragic story. When it comes to gun violence, our focus as a nation is understandably pulled toward appalling, nearly inconceivable mass shootings in public places like schools and government buildings. Yet the truth is that homicide in America is largely driven by day-to-day gun violence in poor, minority communities—often young black men shooting other young black men—that the press fails to report.[8]

For example, a total of 90 people were killed in mass shootings in 2012, including the horrific assault weapon massacre at a movie theater in Aurora, CO. That same year, nearly 6,000 black men were murdered in shootings that rarely made the news.[9] In 2014, 82 people were shot in Chicago *over the Fourth of July weekend alone*.[10] In the words of pastor and civil rights leader Michael McBride, "Any meaningful conversation about addressing gun violence has to include urban gun violence."[11]

A total of 90 people were killed in mass shootings in 2012. *That same year, nearly 6,000 black men were murdered in shootings that rarely made the news.*

As the nation refocuses on the historical and systemic denigration of the identity and security of black and brown lives, the gun violence prevention movement, along with government leaders, must face the uncomfortable truth that not nearly enough has been done to address this particular facet of the gun violence epidemic. Taking on the staggeringly disproportionate rates of gun violence in impoverished communities of color is nothing short of a shared moral imperative for all Americans.

We can do more, and we must do more.

For the past year, the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence and the PICO National Network have been working together to identify, evaluate, and advocate for the most effective solutions to urban gun violence. *Healing Communities in Crisis* is the culmination of that partnership. As with any complex problem, a multipronged approach is required to bring about real change—in the case of urban gun violence, that means a combination of both community-based intervention programs and long-overdue policy reforms at the local, state, and federal levels. As a movement, activists can no longer adopt a "one or the other" approach—it has to be everything, and all at once.

In the coming chapters, we first identify and examine a number of community intervention programs that have been proven to directly and substantially reduce gun violence in the hardest-hit neighborhoods. The most effective programs share a common premise, borne out by years of data: a very small and readily identifiable segment of a city's population

is responsible for the vast majority of that city's gun violence. By strategically intervening with this small population—usually only a few hundred people—**these programs have been able to cut gun homicide rates by as much as 50% in as little as two years**. Importantly, such programs aim to reduce gun violence without contributing to the high levels of mass incarceration that have wreaked havoc on communities of color.[12]

We then lay out a number of badly needed legal reforms that will go a long way toward helping prevent day-to-day gun violence. From universal background checks to permit to purchase laws to cracking down on weapons trafficking, these lifesaving smart gun laws address the easy access to firearms that helps fuel the deadly cycle of violence in urban areas. The vast majority of states are not implementing any of these policies at present, so there is a tremendous amount that can and should be done at the state level, especially given the disgraceful climate of federal inaction on gun laws.

Identifying the most promising solutions to America's urban gun violence epidemic is only the first step. Meaningful change requires an investment of both public attention and financial resources. To ignore the problem and do nothing is to give in to the morally bankrupt argument that gun violence in minority communities is somehow not America's shared problem, that those lives don't count. When scores of Americans are being gunned down in the streets every day, it is our obligation as a nation to act—especially when proven solutions are readily available. And while the programs featured here require funding to be effective, any investment will pale in comparison to the $229 billion that gun violence costs Americans each year.[13]

Yes, $229 billion. And these costs are shouldered by society as a whole—over $700 per American per year—not just by the communities where gun violence is most prevalent. As public policy scholars Philip Cook and Jens Ludwig note, "Although gunshot injuries disproportionately impact the poor, the threat of gun violence reduces the quality of life for all Americans by engendering concerns about safety, raising taxes, and limiting choices about where to live, work, travel, and attend school."[14] Whether we recognize it or not, gun violence is a problem for all communities—one we must work together to solve.

By implementing the programs and reforms detailed in these pages, we can begin to break the deadly and devastating cycle of gun violence and economic suppression that has ravaged far too many of America's urban communities of color for far too long.

The good news is that we already know what works. The biggest challenge now is taking action.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
HOW TO END AN EPIDEMIC

Imagine living in a country where if you had two sons, there would be a 1-in-20 chance one of them would be shot before he's out of his teens.[15] That might sound like a warzone or a failed state, but it actually describes the situation for black families in modern America. In order to solve urban gun violence, we first have to understand the full scope of this insidious epidemic.

As with homicide in general, gun homicide (which makes up the vast majority of murders in America) tends to cluster disproportionately in dense urban areas, particularly within impoverished communities of color.[16] In 2012, America's average homicide rate was 4.7 per 100,000 people.[17] This may not sound high, but is actually much greater than comparable Western nations. In France, for example, the homicide rate in 2010 was just 1.2 per 100,000—about four times lower than the US rate.[18]

America's homicide numbers are even worse when broken down by race, gender, and location. The murder rate among black Americans is over 20 per 100,000 people.[19] For young black men, the rate is closer to 90 homicides per 100,000 people—*nearly 20 times the national average*.[20]

In American urban centers with significant minority populations, like New Orleans, Detroit, and Baltimore, the homicide rate is up to 10 times higher than the national average—between 30 and 40 murders per 100,000 people.[21] Large variations are also seen within specific neighborhoods in any given city. One study calculated that young black men living in a high-crime area of Rochester, NY, had a murder rate of 520 per

100,000—*over 100 times higher than the national average*.[22] To put that in context, the average yearly hostile death rate for combat troops in Iraq and Afghanistan was 315 deaths per 100,000 soldiers.[23]

In 2012, black Americans made up more than half of all firearm homicides, *while comprising just 13% of the US population.*

When looking specifically at homicide, people of color, who disproportionately live in densely populated, underserved urban areas, are particularly vulnerable to gun violence.[24] In 2012, black Americans made up more than half of all firearm homicides, while comprising just 13% of the US population.[25] This disparity is even more acute when looking at black men, who make up only 6% of the population, yet still constitute more than half of all gun homicide victims.[26] In fact, firearm homicide is the leading cause of death for black males ages 15–34.[27] The numbers are not any better with respect to non-fatal shootings—the rate of gun injuries is 10 times higher for black children and teens than it is for white children and teens.[28]

In other words, while much of America enjoys relative safety and freedom from gun violence, there are many impoverished minority neighborhoods that are more akin to modern warzones. In many of these areas, parents have to teach their children to hide under beds or in bathtubs at the sound of gunfire. In one embattled neighborhood of New Orleans, a little girl wrote a letter to a neighbor explaining that her main goal in life was simply to survive long enough to graduate from high school.[29]

Highly concentrated levels of violence creates a vicious cycle. A study of adolescents participating in an urban violence intervention program showed that 26% of participants had witnessed a person being shot and killed, while *half* had lost a loved one to gun violence.[30] The impact of this is compounded because exposure to firearm violence—being shot, being shot at, or witnessing a shooting—*doubles* the probability that a young person will commit a violent act within two years.[31] In other words, exposure to violence perpetuates further violent behavior, creating a chain of murders and maimings that will continue absent an intervention.

Making matters worse, the criminal justice system has been proven to operate less effectively in minority communities. One study of thousands of homicide investigations in Los Angeles found that murder cases with white victims were over 40% more likely to be solved than cases with minority victims. In addition, cases where the victims were black or Hispanic were less likely to result in criminal charges and, when charges were filed, led to lighter penalties than in cases with white victims.[32] In communities where murder goes unpunished, it is not uncommon for residents to seek justice outside the

legal system. A great deal of urban homicides are retaliatory in nature, carried out when individuals believe formal legal mechanisms are unavailable.[33]

In neighborhoods with high levels of gun violence, economic opportunity is suppressed, property values lowered, and general health is heavily impacted as community members become afraid to walk the streets.[34] As one resident of a high-crime area of New York City explained, the fear associated with the daily threat of gunfire "controls you. It does not allow you to be. It makes you feel like a prisoner when you have not committed a crime."[35] This fear creates a particularly problematic negative feedback loop: gun violence is often driven by the desperation that comes with lack of economic opportunity, yet shootings scare away potential businesses. Until the violence stops, efforts at economic revival are suppressed, further impoverishing already struggling communities.

While these troubling statistics paint a bleak picture, the good news is that solutions exist. Several extremely promising strategic intervention programs have been shown to successfully reduce gun violence in the very communities that are most impacted.

Healing Communities in Crisis lays out the most effective gun violence intervention programs in detail and identifies the best resources for cities wishing to implement them. In addition, we present a suite of desperately needed legal reforms that will help reduce urban gun violence. The best—the only—way to end this epidemic of death and fear in our cities is through a comprehensive strategy that embraces both proven violence intervention programs and smart gun laws. The recent success of several California cities in dramatically cutting gun violence rates demonstrates the incredible progress that is possible when both of these levers are pulled simultaneously.

A Note on Mass Incarceration: In addressing gun violence, policymakers cannot lose sight of the out-of-control mass incarceration that has severely impacted communities of color. Black males make up 6% of the population, but constitute roughly 60% of male inmates.[36] Black citizens are incarcerated at six times the rate of whites.[37] These rates of incarceration for minority communities are historically unprecedented,[38] and the overwhelming majority of people of color swept into the criminal justice system are non-violent offenders.[39] This disparity in incarceration has had a devastating impact, especially on urban communities, and must be reversed.[40] In a world where one in three black males and one in six Hispanic males born today can expect to go to prison in his lifetime,[41] policies addressing gun violence need to be sensitive to the crisis of mass incarceration and crafted carefully with an eye toward alleviating, rather than exacerbating, the problem.

IDENTIFYING THE MOST PROMISING SOLUTIONS

Group Violence Intervention: Problem-Oriented Policing

The Group Violence Intervention (GVI) strategy, a form of problem-oriented policing (as opposed to traditional "incident-driven" policing), was first used in the enormously successful Operation Ceasefire in Boston in the mid-1990s, where it was associated with a 61% reduction in youth homicide. The program has now been implemented in a wide variety of American cities, with consistently impressive results.

GVI is based on the insight that, in city after city, an incredibly small and readily identifiable segment of a given community is responsible for the vast majority of gun violence. These individuals are often affiliated with groups that exist in a constant state of competition and violent rivalry with other groups. (The term "gang" is intentionally not used in the context of GVI because it is considered pejorative and under-inclusive. "Gang" also implies a level of organizational sophistication missing from the informal street crews frequently responsible for the majority of a given neighborhood's violence.)

The first step of the GVI model is to assemble respected and credible community members, faith leaders, social service providers, researchers, and law enforcement officials into a working partnership. This partnership begins by identifying the individuals in the community most at risk for committing or becoming the victims of gun violence.

The partnership then conducts a series of in-person meetings, known as "call-ins," with this small segment of the population. Call-ins are intimate affairs—involving no more than 30 attendees—and their primary purpose is to communicate a strong message that that the shooting must stop. Importantly, this message comes from the moral voice of the community, often represented by clergy members, victims of gun violence, parents of victims, and former perpetrators of violence who have escaped their old way of life.

Law enforcement representatives then deliver a message, in the most respectful terms possible, that if the community's plea is ignored, then swift and sure legal action will be taken against any group responsible for a new act of lethal violence. This process is repeated until the intervention population understands that, *at the request of the community*, future shootings will bring strong law enforcement attention on any responsible groups. This creates a powerful "focused deterrence" effect that has been shown to rapidly reduce violent behavior.

The GVI strategy also takes into account the fact that urban gun violence tends to arise from conditions of economic desperation and is frequently committed by the most chronically underserved individuals. During call-ins, at-risk individuals are connected with social service providers familiar with the resources needed to bring about meaningful

change at the individual level. These services include GED tutoring, transportation assistance, mental health treatment, housing support, and even tattoo removal (to facilitate a break from group or gang identity). A person whose basic needs are being met is far less likely to engage in violent behavior. While law enforcement action provides a stick to discourage further violence, offering access to critical social services acts as a carrot to simultaneously encourage positive change.

The GVI model has a remarkably strong track record: *a documented association with homicide reductions of between 30% and 60%.*

The importance of the role community and faith leaders play in the GVI model cannot be overstated. Their advocacy, engagement, and organizing are often the driving force to create, sustain, and reinforce the policy and political pressure necessary for this strategy to be fully implemented and resourced. By bringing the moral voice of the community to the table, GVI has the ability to increase the legitimacy of law enforcement action, while also saving lives.

GVI capitalizes on recent research in the field of criminology that suggests people are far more likely to follow laws they perceive as legitimate. While law enforcement plays an essential role in GVI, the strategy's success depends on the dedicated participation of community leaders. When this happens, at-risk individuals are more likely to recognize that police are acting on behalf of the neighborhood, rather than as an occupying, external force. In this way, the GVI model not only reduces gun violence, but also has the potential to rebuild strained relationships between law enforcement and residents of high-crime urban neighborhoods.

Language matters a great deal in GVI. How the strategy describes both victims and perpetrators, as well as its interventions and tactics, has a profound impact. The strategy does not refer to those at the highest risk of shooting or being shot with perjorative terms such as *gang members*, *thugs*, or *predators*. Such language dehumanizes those involved and creates a greater separation between the community and the people being asked to stop the violence, in effect making it much harder for any interventions to succeed. Instead, the GVI strategy refers to participants as *clients*, *individuals*, and *fellow community members*—terms that convey a sense of dignity, respect, and belonging.

The GVI model has a remarkably strong track record: a documented association with homicide reductions of between 30% and 60%. In light of this strong performance, GVI has become the leading intervention program for cities plagued by gun violence.

Communities considering the Gun Violence Intervention strategy should begin by visiting the National Network for Safe Communities at nnscommunities.org.

Cities in California should also reach out to the California Partnership for Safe Communities at thecapartnership.org. Community and faith leaders interested in learning more about GVI should contact the PICO Network's Live Free Campaign at livefreeusa.org. State and federal leaders can support these lifesaving efforts to prevent gun violence by increasing the financial resources available for localities looking to implement GVI and other intervention models.

Cure Violence: Treating Violence as a Disease

Another strategy that has shown promise in recent years treats gun violence as a communicable disease and works to interrupt its transmission among community members. **The Cure Violence model employs "Violence Interrupters," individuals who understand the dynamics of the streets and are able to connect with those who are most at-risk to commit or become the victims of gun violence.**

Violence Interrupters use their position of respect in the community to mediate conflicts and defuse potentially dangerous situations before they become violent. At the same time, Outreach Workers attempt to connect the most at-risk individuals with badly needed social support services. All of this occurs while a norm-changing campaign takes place to send the message that violence will no longer be tolerated by the community.

A recent study of Cure Violence in Chicago found that its implementation in several targeted districts was associated with a 38% greater decrease in homicides and a 15% greater decrease in shootings, compared to districts that did not receive the intervention. More information is available at cureviolence.org.

Hospital-Based Violence Intervention: Leveraging a Teachable Moment

Hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIPs) focus services on young adults recovering from violent injuries like gunshot wounds. This group is at an extremely high risk of being injured again, as well as of retaliating with violence. **The HVIP strategy reduces the risk of further injury by taking advantage of a unique "teachable moment," connecting hospital patients with culturally competent caseworkers able to identify those patients' needs and shepherd them to appropriate resources.**

A prime example of HVIP is the San Francisco Wraparound Project, first introduced in 2005. In its first six years of operation, the Wraparound Project was associated with a fourfold decrease in injury recidivism rates. Moreover, studies have shown that this form

of intervention actually saves hospitals money by preventing future injuries, both for the patient and for anyone the patient may have considered retaliating against. For more information, visit the National Network of Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs at nnhvip.org.

The Comprehensive Approach

It should be noted that strategies like Gun Violence Intervention, Cure Violence, and Hospital-based Violence Intervention are by no means mutually exclusive. In fact, several cities have adopted a comprehensive approach that combines various elements from each model into an effective, holistic response to gun violence.

In addition to delving deeply into the three strategies described above, we also examine successful gun violence prevention efforts in Richmond, CA. The city brought its homicide rate down from 40 per 100,000 residents (one of the highest in the country) to 11 per 100,000 residents in just a few years while implementing many of the major recommendations discussed here. Of special note is the fact that Richmond created the Office of Neighborhood Safety, an independent government agency exclusively dedicated to coordinating gun violence prevention efforts citywide. Later chapters explore the case study of Richmond in much greater depth.

Legal Solutions: Reducing the Supply of Crime Guns with Smart Gun Laws

Gun violence is fueled by easy access to firearms. *Healing Communities in Crisis* identifies the legal reforms that are most likely to impact the overall gun homicide rate in high-crime urban neighborhoods by reducing the supply of illegal guns. This includes policies like:

- **Universal background checks**
- **Permit to purchase and gun licensing requirements**
- **Minimum age restrictions**
- **Prohibiting "junk guns"**
- **Better regulating firearms dealers to reduce gun trafficking**
- **Limiting bulk purchases of handguns**
- **Requiring gun owners to report lost or stolen firearms**
- **Prohibiting large capacity magazines**
- **Encouraging "smart gun" technology that prevents unauthorized use**
- **Microstamping bullets to assist in solving gun crimes**

Many of these policies have been implemented in California over the past two decades, with great success. After enacting a number of smart gun laws between 1993 and 2013, California reduced its gun death rate by 56%, twice the reduction seen in the rest of the country.[42] However, as the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence's *2015 Gun Law State Scorecard* demonstrates, most states still receive an F when it comes to gun laws. (Find out your state's grade at gunlawscorecard.org.) Of the states that are the 10 worst in terms of homicide rates for black Americans,[43] six scored an F and the best grade is only a C. There is no doubt that smart gun laws, properly implemented and enforced, would help to better protect urban communities of color from deadly shootings.

After enacting smart gun laws between 1993 and 2013, California reduced its gun death rate by 56%, *twice the reduction seen in the rest of the country.*

For the gun laws identified here to be truly effective, they must be enacted either at the federal level or by a much larger number of states. In Chicago, for example, a city with strong gun laws but high rates of gun violence, more than half of the firearms used to commit crimes are trafficked in from neighboring states, particularly Indiana, which does very little to regulate guns.[44] Similarly, in 2013, nearly 70% of the crime guns recovered and traced in New York—a state with strong, comprehensive gun laws—originated from outside the state.[45] Until these weaknesses are addressed, urban communities will continue to suffer disproportionately from the devastating effects of easy access to guns.

For more information on policy solutions to gun violence, visit the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence at smartgunlaws.org.

The Bottom Line

While policy is an essential piece of the puzzle, laws alone are not enough to completely eradicate gun violence in America. The intervention programs identified in this report must also be implemented to address the problem where it is most acute. A comprehensive approach that embraces legal reforms while at the same time aggressively pursuing proven intervention strategies is the best way forward—and will save vast numbers of lives.

Our fellow Americans are being gunned down in the streets each and every day, often without even making the news. The ongoing gun violence in our impoverished urban neighborhoods is a social and moral tragedy that we have a collective duty to address. *Healing Communities in Crisis* identifies the concrete tools we have at our disposal to confront this epidemic and save lives.

INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

INTERVENTION PROGRAMS
STRATEGIES THAT WORK

A number of very promising intervention strategies specifically designed to reduce urban gun violence have emerged in recent years. A growing body of evidence shows that these programs, when implemented correctly and properly funded, produce impressive, lifesaving results in a short time. This chapter analyzes three categories of intervention programs: Group Violence Intervention, Cure Violence, and Hospital-based Violence Intervention, as well as a comprehensive approach that combines elements from all three.

I. GROUP VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

Any community suffering from high levels of gun violence needs to know about, understand, and strongly consider the Group Violence Intervention (GVI) strategy, a form of problem-oriented policing that now has an impressive track record of success in a diverse array of American cities. GVI traces its origins back to the mid-1990s, where it was implemented under the name Operation Ceasefire in Boston.[46] At the time, the city was suffering from off-the-charts levels of youth homicide.

Harvard researchers and criminologists, community members, and criminal justice practitioners collaborated to design and implement Operation Ceasefire, which was associated with a 61% reduction in youth homicide.[47] Not only did youth homicide fall by nearly two-thirds in the two years after Ceasefire was implemented, but homicide among

all ages citywide fell by about half at a time when there were no equivalent declines in 39 similarly situated cities.[48] This incredible result was dubbed the Boston Miracle.

The GVI approach has evolved over the years, although the core model has remained the same, and has now been adopted in cities across the country, including recently in New Orleans, Cincinnati, Oakland, and New Haven. As will be discussed in more detail below, researchers have documented impressive results in nearly every city to embrace and faithfully implement the GVI model. *Healing Communities in Crisis* provides a general overview, but cities looking to implement this strategy should consult directly with the National Network for Safe Communities (**nnscommunities.org**).

HOW GVI WORKS

At the most basic level, GVI is a four-step, problem-oriented policing strategy that harnesses decades' worth of research in the field of criminology.

1. **Form the Team.** Convene a local, interagency Working Group consisting of top leaders from law enforcement, social service agencies, and community-based organizations. This Working Group is responsible for implementing and monitoring the GVI strategy.

2. **Gather the Data.** Identify the individuals and groups most at risk for either committing or becoming victims of gun violence. In city after city, there turns out to be a very discrete subset of individuals and groups that are both responsible for, and the victims of, a hugely disproportionate share of gun violence. (As noted above, the term "group" is used here instead of "gang" because "gang" is both pejorative and suggests a level of organization and sophistication that is often lacking from the loose affiliations of young men that actually drive large portion of urban gun violence. The term "group" more accurately captures the nature of these affiliations and does not serve to dehumanize the individuals in question.)

3. **Communicate the Message.** Invite the identified individuals to a "call-in" where local community members, law enforcement officials, and social service providers convey a powerful message that the shooting must stop. If it does not, law enforcement will use all available mechanisms to bring enforcement actions against the responsible group. Attendees simultaneously receive a message that the community cares about them and wants to see them alive, safe,

and out of prison. To that end, various social services are offered, and attendees are given a single phone number that will connect them to needed services in the future.

4. **Follow Through and Repeat.** The next time a homicide is committed, law enforcement follows through with its promise and takes all available legal enforcement action against the responsible group. Other call-ins are held until the message is adequately distributed to the intervention population. Progress indicators are tracked and measured. This includes ongoing levels of violence, the number of individuals asking for and receiving social services, the number and character of enforcement actions taken, and so forth.

The following sections describe the GVI approach in greater detail and unpack each part of the process. Much more information is available from the National Network of Safe Communities at nnscommunities.org.

Forming the Implementation Team

For a city that is committing to the GVI model, the first step of the process is to put together the team that will implement the intervention. According to the National Network's Implementation Guide,[49] this will vary from locality to locality, but is best accomplished through the cooperation of three primary bodies:

1. An **Executive Committee** comprised of a select group of local leaders with high-level management experience who are completely committed to implementing the GVI strategy.

2. A **Working Group** comprised of representatives from the local community (e.g., clergy leaders), law enforcement (e.g., the local police chief), social service providers (e.g., leaders from prominent community-based organizations), and ideally, an outside research group, such as a local college or university.

3. A full-time **Project Manager** to coordinate the overall effort.

In Boston, for example, the Working Group consisted of Harvard researchers and leaders from several law enforcement agencies, including the Boston Police Department, the Massachusetts departments of probation and parole, the US Attorney's office, ATF, the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services, and others. Key community members included black clergy leaders from the TenPoint Coalition, as well as parents of victims

of gun violence. Finally, social service providers included group outreach and prevention "streetworkers" attached to the Boston Community Centers program.[50]

Getting full buy-in and energetic support for the GVI model from key groups such as these is an essential ingredient of successful implementation. One of the outstanding experts over the years has proven to be the PICO Network's Live Free Campaign, a national group of faith-based and directly impacted leaders, formerly incarcerated individuals, and young people who organize to reduce gun violence and mass incarceration (livefreeusa.org).

Assess and Define the Problem

With these pieces in place, the next step of the GVI strategy is to assess the community's specific violence problem, in other words, identifying exactly who and what are driving violence locally. In essence, this step involves gathering both quantitative and qualitative data from law enforcement officials and community members who are most familiar with the violence problem. This will include a record of recent violent incidents, names and locations of the most active groups, whether certain groups have known rivalries, the individuals in each group, and so forth.

In Cincinnati, 60 groups with 1500 total members (less than 0.5% of the population) *were associated with 75% of homicides— as victim, perpetrator, or both.*

When this process is complete, it will be possible to identify those most likely to either commit or become the victims of violence. In Cincinnati, for example, this process identified 60 groups with an estimated total membership of 1500 people (less than 0.5% of the city's population) who were associated with 75% of homicides in the city—as victim, perpetrator, or both.[51] The GVI strategy focuses exclusively on these individuals, channeling scarce resources to where they are needed most.

The Demonstration Enforcement Action

Once the problem is understood and the most at-risk individuals identified, the next step of the GVI strategy is referred to as the *demonstration enforcement action*. The idea here is to identify a group that is visibly responsible for recent violence or otherwise known in the community for its violent behavior. Once the group and its members are identified, an interagency law enforcement plan is designed to bring highly visible legal actions against the group (generally enforcement actions will be carried out against an entire group because group members have a variety of legal vulnerabilities, including old cases,

outstanding warrants, probation violations, or outstanding child support payments—rather than acting on these issues in a seemingly random fashion, the GVI model calls for visible enforcement in response to acts of lethal violence). These actions are to take place shortly before the first of the call-ins with other at-risk individuals.

This step is critical because it demonstrates that a partnership of law enforcement agencies has a new focus on violent behavior and meaningful consequences will result for the responsible groups if the violence continues.[52] Without the demonstration enforcement action as tangible proof of this new reality, the call-in is much less effective.

The Call-In

A call-in is a formal, in person communication addressed to individuals involved with group-related violence. The message comes primarily from the moral voice of the community—often consisting of local clergy members, neighborhood shooting victims, parents who have lost children to gun violence, and former perpetrators of gun violence who have managed to turn their lives around—as well as law enforcement officers and social service providers. The core of the message is:

1. **The community will not tolerate further violence.**
2. **At the behest of the community, law enforcement's response to future violence will be swift, sure, and directed at the entire responsible group.**
3. **A genuine offer of support and help for those who want it.**

An effective call-in is generally held at a neutral, non-threatening site of civic importance (e.g., a library or community center), involves a relatively small group of invitees (30 or fewer), does not last more than 90 minutes, and is conducted in a respectful tone. Getting invitees to attend the call-in requires a combination of hand-delivering letters that explain attendees will not be arrested, but need to hear an important announcement, and requiring invitees who may be on probation to attend the call-in as part of their regular reporting. To ensure high attendance, invitees must be given notice at least 1–2 weeks in advance of the call-in.

Community speakers generally include parents of victims and/or formerly incarcerated individuals who have walked away from a life of violence. These speakers help set the tone by underscoring that this process is what the community wants and is not being driven by law enforcement—rather, law enforcement is acting at the behest of the community. This helps to increase the legitimacy of any future enforcement actions.

For law enforcement speakers, the key message is that a new set of rules is now in place and the response to future violence will be certain and aimed not just at the individual who pulled the trigger, but at that individual's entire group. Importantly, this is not a message that other crimes will be ignored, but rather that violent crime will attract an especially intense enforcement reaction upon the whole group.

Social service speakers emphasize the fact that help is available for those who want it and provide a single phone number that attendees may call if they need assistance in the future. Attendees are then asked to return to their peers and relay the message that violence will no longer be tolerated. In this way, the message is spread among the groups most likely to participate in future violence.[53]

Follow Through

The Working Group then meets periodically to ensure that the promises made at the call-in are being carried out. If further acts of violence are committed, law enforcement follows through with enforcement actions against the entire responsible group, not just those involved with the act of violence in question. If new information is received about impending violence—for example, recent threats of retaliation among rival groups—custom notifications to specific individuals may be useful.

After Boston Ceasefire ended in 2000, youth homicide rates climbed rapidly—*by 2006, youth homicide had increased 160%.*

Social service groups track which individuals have accessed services and continue to reach out to those who may need further assistance. Examples of this assistance include GED training, tattoo removal (to remove group affiliations and help with job placement), mental health services, locating affordable housing, obtaining a driver's license, and vocational training.

Further group call-ins are conducted until the Working Group is satisfied that the message has reached the desired number of groups and individuals. Intervention goals should be reassessed as new data becomes available.

As the experience with Boston Ceasefire demonstrated, strong commitment to the GVI model over time is a critical element of long-term efficacy.[54] Soon after Boston Ceasefire ended in 2000, youth homicide rates began to climb rapidly—by 2006, youth homicide had increased 160%.[55]

WHY GVI WORKS

The GVI strategy is effective for a number of reasons. First, it is narrowly focused on a specific problem. Rather than trying to address a whole slew of social issues at once, GVI focuses directly on reducing rates of homicide and violence.

Second, GVI is focused on a small and specific group of the most at-risk individuals. An extremely tiny portion of a given area is generally responsible for the majority of that area's gun violence. The experience of many different cities across the country establishes that "group members typically constitute less than 0.5% of a city's population but are consistently linked to 60% to 70% of the shootings and homicides."[56] Where both law enforcement and community resources are often limited, GVI works by directing available resources to the root of the violence problem.

Third, the GVI strategy is a genuine partnership between law enforcement, community members, and social service providers—it is not exclusively a law enforcement effort. This increases legitimacy in areas where community/police relations may be extremely strained.[57] A message that the violence needs to stop is not one that is likely to be heard when coming directly from law enforcement, but is more likely to be heeded when coming from respected community members, including former perpetrators of violence who have turned their lives around and local mothers and fathers who have lost children to senseless killings.[58]

As a concrete example, prior to implementing Operation Ceasefire, Boston experimented with an exclusively law enforcement-driven approach to violence that was essentially "a wholesale stop-and-frisk policy aimed at young black men."[59] This policy drew an incredible amount of resistance from the black community, the courts, and the press. The lesson, according to one of the law enforcement officers that participated in this effort and who later played a key part in Operation Ceasefire, was that "we couldn't [succeed in reducing violence] alone and we couldn't do it without support from the community and other agencies. And that [the solution] couldn't be just policing, or just enforcement; there had to be prevention, too."[60]

Legitimacy increases when law enforcement actions are perceived by group members to be in response to community demands, rather than coming exclusively from law enforcement. A growing body of research shows that potential offenders are more likely to obey the laws that they perceive as legitimate.[61] The GVI model helps to promote that very kind of legitimacy.

Fourth, the GVI model is based on findings that deterrence actions are most effective when punishment becomes more certain.[62] It is not the length of the sentence that matters as much, but rather the certainty that engaging in a particular behavior will result in negative consequences. This "focused deterrence" changes behaviors by effectively communicating (and actively demonstrating) that the rules have changed for group members and continued violent behavior will bring swift and certain enforcement actions, both great (homicide charges) and small (probation violations), that will apply to the entire group—not just the individual who happened to pull the trigger.[63] Group norms are more likely to change when group members understand that one member's decision to resort to violence will have negative consequences for everyone in the group.

As a result, GVI may provide a model for reducing violence while also lowering levels of mass incarceration. Work done recently in Chicago suggests that call-ins for offenders who have recently left prison and reentered the community have been associated with measurable reductions in recidivism rates.[64]

GVI'S STRONG RECORD OF SUCCESS

Since its inception with Operation Ceasefire in Boston in 1996, the GVI strategy has been implemented in a variety of cities across America and now boasts a very robust and well-documented record of success. Indianapolis adopted GVI in the late 1990s, based on the principles established in Boston. An evaluation of the Indianapolis effort, which was referred to as the Indianapolis Violence Reduction Partnership (IVRP), found that IVRP was associated with a 34% decrease in homicides each month.[65] A follow-up evaluation also confirmed a "statistically significant 38% reduction in gang homicides following the implementation of IVRP."[66]

The city of Stockton, CA, implemented the GVI strategy in 1997 in response to a rise in youth homicide and continued its program, known as Operation Peacekeeper, until the end of 2002. A study of the effects of Operation Peacekeeper compared Stockton with other cities where no GVI strategy had been implemented and found that the intervention was associated with a 42% reduction in monthly gun homicides. Moreover, the study noted that "none of the comparison cities experienced a statistically significant reduction in the monthly count of gun homicides that coincided with the implementation of the Peacekeeper intervention in Stockton."[67]

Notably, soon after Stockton abandoned its GVI strategy, the city saw an increase in homicides over a period of several years, with overall homicides hitting an all-time high in 2011.[68] After turning back to the strategy in 2012, homicides decreased by 40% and shootings were down by about 50% following the first two years of GVI implementation.[69]

The clear lesson is that long-term commitment to GVI is important in consolidating and sustaining results over time. Compared to the staggering costs of both gun violence, estimated at $229 billion per year, and incarceration costs of as much as $60,000 per year *per inmate*, this investment in resources is well-justified.[70]

In 2002, Lowell, MA, implemented a GVI strategy with the help of federal funding from the Department of Justice's Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative (PSN) in an attempt to address rising gun violence. A study of the intervention found "a statistically significant 44% reduction in the monthly count of gun assault incidents." At the same time, researchers found that "neither the comparison cities nor the State of Massachusetts experienced a statistically significant reduction in the monthly count of gun homicides that coincided with the implementation of the PSN intervention in Lowell." In other words, these results could not be attributed to some wider trend of statewide violence reduction, but rather were specifically associated with the implementation of the GVI strategy.

Similar results have been observed with GVI programs implemented in recent years:

- **Chicago (2002)**—23% reduction in overall shooting behavior and a 32% reduction in gunshot victimization for targeted groups compared to similar groups that didn't experience GVI.[71]
- **Cincinnati (2007)**—35% reduction in monthly group-related homicides and a 21% reduction in monthly total shootings.[72]
- **New Haven (2012)**—a significant reduction of nearly five group-related shootings and homicides per month.[73]
- **New Orleans (2012)**—17% reduction in overall homicides, 32% reduction in group-related homicides, 26% reduction in homicides that involved young black male victims, and a 16% reduction in both lethal and nonlethal firearms violence.[74]

In 2012, researchers for the Campbell Collaboration, an organization that evaluates the efficacy of social intervention programs, conducted an extensive review of the available data and found "strong empirical evidence for the crime prevention effectiveness" of the GVI strategy.[75] This evaluation identified 10 studies that qualified for analysis based on meeting certain design standards and concluded that "nine out of 10 eligible studies reported strong and statistically significant crime reductions associated with the [GVI] approach."[76] Only in Newark, NJ, was there no observable and statistically significant decrease in shootings.

Based on all the available findings, the Campbell Collaboration report recommends "that jurisdictions suffering from gang violence, overt drug markets, and repeat offender problems should add focused deterrence strategies to their existing portfolio of prevention and control interventions. The existing evidence suggests these new approaches to crime prevention and control generate noteworthy crime reductions."[77]

Another meta-study (i.e., a study of studies) from 2012 reviewed an array of gun violence prevention strategies and concluded that "comprehensive community-based law enforcement initiatives have performed the best at reducing gun violence."[78] Furthermore, the report found that the most effective of these programs "combined both punitive and supportive strategies to effectively reduce gun violence."[79] The authors of the meta-study concluded by noting that "there is clear promise for programs that attempt to increase both accountability and social support to the program's participants."[80] This is exactly the balance of carrots and sticks called for by the GVI model.

The White House requested $74 million for GVI grants, but Congress only appropriated $30 million. *Just four of more than 60 cities that applied received federal funding.*

Additionally, the Department of Justice has compiled a review of known crime prevention strategies, in which it gives the GVI approach its highest rating, noting the existence of multiple studies confirming GVI's efficacy.[81]

Although GVI has a proven track record, it is still not receiving sufficient federal funding. In 2012, for example, the White House requested $74 million for five grants intended to spread GVI and other similar programs to urban areas, but Congress only appropriated $30 million for this purpose.[82] As a result, cities applying for grants to pursue the GVI strategy are being turned away. In early 2012, Indianapolis applied for a Justice Department grant to help implement a new GVI program, and requested just $500,000 a year, for three years, a request that was denied. In fact, just four of more than 60 cities that applied received funding.[83]

Part of the national strategy for reducing gun violence must include adequate financial support for GVI—an approach that is proven to effectively address the gun violence crisis where it is most acute.

II. CURE VIOLENCE

Another promising approach to reducing urban gun violence is the Chicago-based Cure Violence (CV) program. CV is rooted in the theory that violence is a behavior pattern that acts like a contagious disease transmitted from person to person via emulation and social norms. A key principle of CV is that, by targeting the individuals most at risk for perpetrating or becoming the victims of violence, it is possible to interrupt and slow the spread of violence within the "infected" community.

Urban gun violence is often extremely concentrated—*a study of Boston over 29 years confirmed that 74% of shootings occurred on just 5% of city blocks.*

Under this framework, America's poor, inner-city neighborhoods are the epicenters of the gun violence epidemic. As discussed in detail above, underserved, predominently black and Hispanic urban areas are plagued by a massively disproportionate share of violence. One recent study found that adolescents living in urban areas were exposed to an average of almost one incident of violence daily.[84] This violence is also often extremely concentrated within those neighborhoods. A study of Boston over a 29-year period confirmed that 74% of the gun violence occurred on only 5% of the street blocks and intersections in the city.[85]

The concentration of gun violence isn't merely limited to certain geographic segments of disadvantaged, high-crime communities—it's also highly concentrated among specific social networks. A report looking at a high-crime neighborhood in Boston found that 85% of all gunshot injuries within that neighborhood occurred entirely within a network of 763 young men of color, constituting less than 2% of the local population.[86]

The Cure Violence approach is based on the fundamental insight that those most likely to be the perpetrators of gun violence are also those most likely to be victims. In fact, exposure to firearm violence, measured as being shot, shot at, or witnessing a shooting, *doubles* the probability that a young person will commit a violent act within two years.[87]

A consequence of this cycle of violence is that behavioral changes in only a tiny segment of the population can yield an enormous decrease in gun violence. In public health terms, the treatment to reduce gun violence need only be administered to a small and readily identifiable population. Preventing even a single shooting is likely to have a

measurable impact on the probability of future violence. The problem is that the most at-risk population for gun violence is also the most traditionally underserved, and is often viewed as the most difficult-to-reach segment of society.

At its core, the CV model (which was originally known as "Ceasefire Chicago," not to be confused with the GVI Ceasefire strategy in Boston and other cities) is built around three primary strategies to reduce violence:

1. **The detection and resolution of potentially violent conflicts.**
2. **The identification and "treatment" of the highest risk individuals.**
3. **Mobilization of the local community in order to change social norms surrounding the use of violence.**[88]

VIOLENCE INTERRUPTERS: RESOLVING CONFLICTS BEFORE THEY BECOME VIOLENT

The first element of the CV model is to detect and resolve potentially violent conflicts through the use of culturally competent individuals known as "Violence Interrupters," whose role is to serve as street-level conflict mediators. The Violence Interrupter (VI) concept is regarded as a unique development in the arena of violence prevention.[89] This strategy arose from experience with earlier community-based violence reduction efforts that were ineffective because they were unable to directly reach the high-risk individuals who were actually engaged in violent behaviors.[90]

The primary role of a VI is to engage with the community to identify potentially violent conflicts and then mediate those conflicts into a peaceful resolution. Such an intervention is not likely to be successful if the parties involved do not trust the mediator or if they perceive him or her to be judgmental, an outsider, or affiliated with law enforcement. For that reason, a VI is generally an individual who comes from the neighborhood in which he or she operates. An effective VI is often someone who was previously engaged in the same high-risk behaviors, including group/gang membership, as the individuals they are now trying to serve. Ideally, VIs are retained as full-time, compensated staff members, although this may differ from community to community, based on available resources.

VIs spend much of their time working in the streets, making connections, and building trust with those most at risk for violence. Through community networks, VIs are able to learn about conflicts that have the potential to turn violent. The prevention of retaliatory violence, for example, is a critical role for VIs, as violent acts in urban areas

are often committed as a way of getting vengeance for a prior act of violence that goes unresolved by formal, legal systems of justice. An evaluation of VIs in Chicago showed that 40% of their mediation efforts concerned retaliatory shootings.[91] Unless these cycles of retaliation are broken, the violence can persist for years, claiming life after life. Upon learning of an incident of violence, a VI's first response is to talk to the family and friends of the victim, in order to discourage them from retaliating.

For example, evaluators of Cure Violence in Chicago reported an incident in which a VI "convinced a man whose car had just been burnt not to retaliate, by pointing out that he had a child and could not move from his present location to protect himself from further violence."[92]

In another successful intervention, a man with a handgun approached a VI and "confessed that he was preparing to stick people up for money. He told the [VI], 'I need money for my baby's Pampers and for food. How can you help me?' The [VI] gave him $300 to buy the supplies. He gave up his gun, and the interrupter turned the gun in to the police."[93] Without well-developed and established relationships of trust, such interventions would not be possible.

The VI position is a unique contribution of the CV model that is based on the fundamental truth that messages of non-violent conflict resolution are unlikely to be heard by those most at risk for violence unless delivered by "insiders" who have seen and experienced the same things as the people they are trying to serve. While interrupting violence is an essential part of the CV model, addressing some the underlying systemic causes of violent behavior is also critical.

OUTREACH WORKERS: CONNECTING THOSE AT-RISK TO AVAILABLE SERVICES

The second element of the CV approach is the identification and treatment of high-risk individuals, which is accomplished through Outreach Workers (OWs). The mission of OWs is to connect clients with services designed to help bring about the positive life changes that are essential to behavior modification. Clients are carefully selected and approached based on their likelihood of involvement with violent behavior.

A survey of 300 CV clients in Chicago found that 90% were involved with groups/gangs, 96% were either black or Hispanic, 82% had been arrested (25% of those before age 14), almost half had been arrested at least five times, more than half had spent time in prison at least once, and almost all were between the ages of 15 and 30.[94] One of the theories underpinning the OW position is that the violence being committed by young

men in the streets is a manifestation of suicidal ideation and sheer desperation. These deep motivations can only be adequately addressed by connecting these young men to appropriate social services—such as professional mental health counseling and access to educational and employment opportunities that will provide an alternative to the street economy. As one experienced OW described, "90% of [these] guys don't want to be who they are."[95] Providing access to the right services can enable troubled young men to begin to see an alternative path.

OWs have access to the key community organizations that provide these services and are responsible for directly connecting clients with these resources. The most frequently reported needs of the client population in Chicago, for example, are employment (76%), education (37%), disengaging from group/gang life (34%), resolving family conflicts (27%), and emotional/psychological counseling (20%). In one evaluation, nearly 85% of OWs reported that their clients were targets of abuse at home.[96] Given the high levels of PTSD in communities plagued by chronic violence, it is not surprising that one study found that "identifying and providing counseling and services to individual clients was one of the most significant components of [CV Chicago], and may have been one of the most successful elements of the program."[97]

The qualities that make an effective OW are very similar to those that make an effective VI, as discussed above, including personal experience with street life and an ability to connect with and gain the respect of the most at-risk individuals within the community. OWs were often involved in criminal activity, spent time in prison, and have since turned their lives around and feel a strong sense of obligation to make things right by serving the community in which they grew up.

CHANGING SOCIAL NORMS: MOBILIZING THE COMMUNITY

The third element of the CV model focuses on changing community-level social norms surrounding the use of violence by educating, empowering, and mobilizing community members, thereby encouraging them to speak out in favor of positive change and peaceful conflict resolution. These efforts target key stakeholders in the community, including residents, clergy members, local business owners, school leaders, directors of community-based organizations, and local political leaders.

Public education is a key component of the effort to change social norms. Drawing on experience from other public health campaigns of the past, CV Chicago focused on distributing a short, easy-to-understand message: "STOP THE SHOOTING," distributing this message on flyers, bumper stickers, and the windows of local businesses. Clergy were asked to speak about non-violence during Sunday services and CV workers made appearances on local television outlets.

In Chicago, community mobilization resulted in organized marches, rallies, and prayer vigils—particularly in the wake of violent episodes—to help carry the "STOP THE SHOOTING" message to the wider community. In a program evaluation interview, a CV staffer explained that shooters continue their violent behavior because "their thinking is that the community doesn't care." Messaging efforts like that of CV Chicago assist in "signaling disapproval and changing the thinking of the shooter." These community responses also deter future shootings, because shooters "don't want attention drawn to them."[98]

As one local priest described, "You could see [our] presence in the area. They saturated the area with material … we had marches and prayer vigils. We mobilized people whenever there were shots fired. Through organizers and outreach workers, we were able to mobilize people in a given area where the activity took place: we prayed and walked."[99]

It is difficult to quantify the specific impact the norm-changing aspect of a CV program has on overall rates of gun violence, but there is evidence that such efforts have a positive effect on a community's sense of empowerment to address gun violence.

For example, in an evaluation of a CV program implemented in Brooklyn, community attitudes shifted noticeably regarding the ability of community mobilization to reduce gun violence, with the percentage of people finding such methods to be "very likely" to reduce gun violence increasing from 29% to 55% over a 15-month period.[100] Given that violence most frequently plagues communities that are disenfranchised in almost every sense, increasing levels of empowerment is a beneficial side effect that should not be overlooked.[101]

Similarly, an evaluation of a CV program in Baltimore's McElderry Park neighborhood found, based on extensive surveys, that "young men in McElderry Park were much less likely than young men in comparison communities to have high levels of support for using gun violence to settle disputes, after controlling for other factors associated with attitudes about gun violence."[102] This finding suggests that norm change was in fact occurring on an individual level.

As the Baltimore evaluators concluded, "The findings from our community survey of youth provide reason for optimism that attitudes presumed to be ingrained among youth in many inner-city neighborhoods … can be impacted by using strategies commonly used in public health programs."[103] While difficult to quantify or measure, these qualitative results suggest the CV model can have a real effect on both social norms and feelings of community empowerment.

RESULTS

Program evaluations conducted to date have found that the CV model is associated with significantly reduced rates of gun violence. A 2014 quantitative evaluation of four Chicago police districts where CV was implemented found a 31% reduction in homicide, a 7% reduction in total violent crime, and a 19% reduction in shootings in targeted districts.[104] The report noted that these reductions were significantly greater than would be expected, even after taking into account the overall declining trends in crime that Chicago was experiencing at the time of the study. The researchers concluded that "this evaluation adds to a growing body of evidence supporting the effectiveness of [CV] intervention, in combination with police presence, for reducing homicide, shootings, and violent crime generally in higher risk neighborhoods."[105]

A 2014 evaluation of four Chicago police districts where CV was implemented found *a 31% reduction in homicide, a 7% reduction in total violent crime, and a 19% reduction in shootings.*

That "growing body of evidence" includes an in-depth evaluation of CV Chicago that was sponsored by the US Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice and carried out by researchers from Northwestern University starting in 2005. This evaluation of seven CV sites over a 16–year period found that "in four sites it appears that the introduction of [CV] was associated with distinct and statistically significant declines in broad measures of actual and attempted shootings, declines that ranged from 16% to 28%."[106] In terms of overall crime patterns, the study also noted that "program areas grew noticeably safer in six of the seven sites."[107] For example, there were "significant shifts in gang homicide patterns" in most of the target sites, "including declines in gang involvement in homicide and retaliatory killings."[108]

A number of experiences in other cities show that the CV model is exportable and capable of producing results, where implemented faithfully. In 2008, CV was successfully replicated in several high-crime neighborhoods of Baltimore, in a project known as "Save Our Streets." A 2012 study of this intervention found that "three of the four program sites experienced large, statistically significant, program-related reductions in homicides or nonfatal shootings."[109] The study gave particular credit to the street-level violence interruption strategy, noting that "mediations of high-stakes disputes with the potential to lead to shootings are the programmatic activities most directly relevant to the immediate reduction in gun violence."[110] From a qualitative perspective, 80% of clients responding to a survey about the program said that their lives were "better" since joining, with a majority reporting improved family relationships as well as employment and education opportunities.[111]

A version of CV was also implemented in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn in 2010. An evaluation of the program found that "average monthly shooting rates in Crown Heights decreased by 6% from the pre- to the post- periods, while increasing in the three comparison areas between 18% and 28%. This analysis suggests that gun violence in Crown Heights was 20% lower than what it would have been had gun violence trends mirrored those of similar, adjacent precincts."[112] The report also showed that over 100 potentially deadly conflicts, involving more than 1,000 people, were mediated by Violence Interrupters since the program's inception.[113]

On the other hand, a version of CV in Pittsburgh that opted to omit several of the original program elements did not produce measureable results, suggesting that fidelity to the core CV model may be an important element of successful replication.[114] According to the evaluators, the Pittsburgh CV program "deviated in several ways from ideal implementation," including inconsistent documentation of data, failure to use data to inform program decisions, and a failure to focus specifically on group/gang-related violence and the individuals most at-risk for violence.[115] In the words of the evaluators, "[Pittsburgh CV] did not partner with local police and prosecutors to communicate a consistent and credible deterrent message that might have changed the perceived risk associated with illegal gun carrying and use, nor did it explicitly focus on influencing social networks of at-risk individuals."[116] This provides an important lesson for cities looking to implement the CV model in the future.

Despite these discouraging short-term results (the study did not focus on long-term effects), the Pittsburgh evaluators were careful to emphasize that "results from Chicago and the initial results from Baltimore suggest the promise of streetworker programs. The results from Pittsburgh suggest the need for continued rigorous evaluation. Taken together, there appears to be enough promise for continued programmatic experimentation with the CV strategy."[117]

A number of qualitative evaluations suggest that, in addition to reducing violence rates, the CV model can have a positive impact on community attitudes and client outlook. One such evaluation on CV Chicago, based on interviews with more than 75 community members, found that CV "is considered a respectable and trustworthy asset to the community."[118] The study went on to report that:

> Consistent across all of the interviews conducted … were individual reports of decreased involvement in crime and violence, with change in behavior attributed to mentoring, primarily around opportunities for employment. Participants also highlighted [CV] workers' ability to mediate conflict within the neighborhood, pointing to workers' unique skill to get high-risk residents to listen and respect their message because they had credibility. High-risk participants reported they were more likely to respond and listen to [CV] workers because the workers had lived a similar life.[119]

Evidence shows that the CV approach provides significant benefits not only to its clients, but also to its employees, both VIs and OWs. As another study of CV Chicago found:

> The benefits of [CV] having hired ex-offenders were considerable. During the evaluation the program employed more than 150 outreach workers and violence interrupters, most of whom at one time or another had been active gang members and many of whom had served time in prison. [CV] offered them a chance for employment in an environment where ex-offenders have limited employment opportunities. Working for [CV] also offered them an opportunity for personal redemption, and a positive role to play in the communities where many had once been active in gangs.[120]

In other words, CV represents a direct invest in impoverished, minority communities that have been perennially underserved and marginalized. It is difficult to quantify the positive impact that this type of investment in social justice is capable of yielding.

Cities struggling with chronic gun violence should certainly consider implementing the Cure Violence model. Experiences in Baltimore and New York suggest that, if followed closely, the model is fully exportable. The Cure Violence website (cureviolence.org) offers a host of resources for cities looking to implement the strategy.

It should be noted that at this point the data supporting CV is not as robust as the data supporting the GVI strategy.[121] The Department of Justice review of known crime prevention strategies, which gives the GVI approach its highest rating (noting the existence of multiple studies confirming that GVI is "effective"), indicates fewer studies supporting the CV model and rates the approach as "promising," rather than "effective."[122] At present, this appears to be a fair evaluation, however, the two strategies should not be viewed as mutually exclusive or somehow in competition with each other. In fact, they have been implemented simultaneously with great success in several cities, including New Orleans and Richmond, CA.

In fact, as discussed above, the CV experience in Pittsburgh suggests that applying CV's principles without a corresponding deterrence message driven by law enforcement action is not as effective. If the resources are available, pursuing both strategies in tandem maximizes the likelihood of saving lives, while also improving community attitudes and outlooks. Richmond's success with this hybrid approach is discussed in detail further below.

III. HOSPITAL-BASED VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

Another promising strategy to reduce gun violence specifically focuses on reaching high-risk individuals who have been recently admitted to a hospital for treatment of a serious violent injury. This strategy, referred to as Hospital-based Violence Intervention (HVIP), is built upon the premise that the strongest risk factor for violent injury is a history of previous violent injury, with the chances of injury recidivism as high as 45% within in the first five years.[123] In fact, a previous violent injury makes future death from violent injury nearly twice as likely. Being the victim of violence also significantly increases the chances of a person becoming a perpetrator of violence.[124]

A TEACHABLE MOMENT

Hospitalization for a serious injury presents a unique "teachable moment" when an individual may be open to positive intervention. Yet, at present, many hospitals generally discharge patients injured from gunshot wounds without any strategy in place to reduce risk of recidivism or retaliation. Leveraging the emotionally critical event of hospitalization is the key to this approach, and there is growing evidence that the cycle of violence can be successfully interrupted by immediate and intensive intervention directly following a violent incident that requires hospitalization.[125]

HOW IT WORKS

HVIP calls for screening patients based on predetermined criteria to identify those individuals most at risk for reinjury and then connecting qualifying candidates with trained, culturally competent case managers.[126] These case managers provide clients with intense oversight and assistance both in the hospital and in the crucial months following the patient's release.

During this time, case managers help connect high-risk individuals to a variety of community-based organizations in order to give them access to critical resources such as mental health services, tattoo removal, GED programs, employment, court advocacy, and housing. Trained case managers help address a major deficiency in health-related communications with underserved populations: the documented lack of cultural competency.[127] In other words, HVIP case managers come from similar backgrounds as their clients and know how to communicate and connect with them on a personal level.

CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

The HVIP strategy was pioneered by YouthAlive! (youthalive.org), a nonprofit organization based in Oakland, CA. With its Caught in the Crossfire program, YouthAlive! seeks to reach young people recovering from violent injuries through the use of trained Intervention Specialists that offer long-term case management, connection to community services, home-based mentoring, and follow-up assistance.

Evaluations of Caught in the Crossfire found that it reduced recidivism rates, with clients 70% less likely to be arrested and 60% less likely to have any criminal involvement compared to a control group.[128] Moreover, the program was found to be cost-effective, especially compared to the cost of juvenile detention and hospitalization, and researchers estimated a total annual cost reduction—in terms of savings in incarceration costs and medical expenses—of $750,000 to $1.5 million per year.[129]

AN OPPORTUNITY TO SAVE LIVES—AND MONEY

As HVIP is implemented in more areas, a growing body of evidence confirms that the HVIP strategy significantly reduces injury recidivism rates and corresponding medical costs, such that these programs may actually save the medical system money.[130] This outcome is not surprising when one considers that the average cost of hospital treatment for non-fatally injured patients is $24,350 with an additional $57,029 for lost productivity.[131] In fact, one investigation estimates that the expenses associated with gun violence cost the American people $229 billion per year.[132] Medical costs are further compounded because gunshot victims are often underinsured and trauma centers only recoup an estimated 30% of medical charges.[133] As many as 30 HVIP programs have been implemented at hospitals around the country over the last decade, and their efficacy is being actively studied.

CASE STUDY: SAN FRANCISCO'S WRAPAROUND PROJECT

San Francisco General Hospital's Wraparound Project (WAP), provides an excellent case study on the promising potential of the HVIP strategy. WAP was introduced in 2005 and in its first six years of operation was associated with a 400% decrease in the rate of injury recidivism.[134]

The program works as follows: after initial post-injury stabilization, all patients at SF General who are victims of violent injury between the ages of 10 and 30 are screened by professional case managers, and those individuals considered to be at a high risk for reinjury are invited to participate in WAP, where they receive intensive case management

services and are guided (rather than merely referred) to risk reduction resources. Nearly 70% of all WAP clients during a six-year period were victims of gun violence, 59% of the participants were black, 26% were Hispanic, the mean age was 21 years, and 87% of all clients during this period were male.[135]

A study of WAP found that injury recidivism rates at SF General fell from 16% to just 4.5% for the six years following implementation.[136] According to another evaluation that looked exclusively at cost-effectiveness, the prevention of just 3.5 recidivist injuries per year renders WAP cost neutral and, at its current level of efficacy, the WAP program actually creates hospital savings of approximately $500,000 per year.[137] A different study of WAP concluded that the HVIP strategy "is effective and cost-effective and should be considered in any trauma center that takes care of violently injured patients."[138]

75% of patients participating in a Philadelphia-based HVIP met the criteria for PTSD. *Many patients do not individually seek post-treatment mental health services.*

As far as specific program efficacy, data from WAP shows that connecting victims with mental health and employment services are the most critical predictors of success (defined for these purposes as a client having more than 50% of needs met without recidivating or dropping out of the program). Those clients who had their mental health needs met were six times more likely to be successful than those who did not, and those whose employment needs were met four times more likely to be successful than those who did not. A "high dose" of case management in the initial three months of the program was also associated with success and those who received at least moderate exposure to a case manager (3–6 hours per week) in the first three months of the program were nearly five times as likely to be successful as those who had low exposure (0–1 hours per week).

These results make sense given one study's finding that 75% of patients participating in Healing Hurt People, a Philadelphia-based HVIP, met the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at the six-month follow-up period.[139] With respect to gun violence specifically, another study found that 52% of patients treated at an urban trauma center for gunshot wounds screened positively for possible PTSD.[140] In spite of the emotional trauma of violent injury, many patients do not individually seek post-treatment mental health services or other forms of counseling.[141] Connecting these individuals with the right resources during this critical period is essential to breaking the cycle of violence and is a core component of the HVIP strategy.

EVALUATIONS OF HVIP

Positive outcomes have been documented in studies of other HVIP programs around the country. An evaluation of an HVIP program in Baltimore, for example, found an injury recidivism rate of 5% for participating patients, compared to 26% for non-participants, which represented an estimated savings of $598,000 in health care costs.[142] Moreover, patients participating in the program were half as likely to be convicted of a crime and four times less likely to be convicted of a violent crime than those who did not participate, translating into approximately $1.25 million in incarceration cost savings.[143]

An evaluation of an Indianapolis-based HVIP program found a one-year reinjury rate of 0% for program participants compared to 8.7% for a historical control group.[144] Evaluations of HVIP programs in Chicago, Oakland, and Richmond, VA, have also reported promising outcomes.[145]

EXPORTING HVIP

Each locality will obviously have different needs and require a slightly different approach, but there are essential lessons to be drawn from San Francisco's experience with WAP, such as the importance of developing ties to the employment and mental health resources available in the community. Despite variations in local conditions, the basic HVIP model should be adaptable to a variety of urban communities suffering from high levels of gun violence. As the implementers of WAP have noted, "Our program works because we seek to aid youth and young adults at the highest risk for reinjury and link them with resources available through community partners via culturally competent case managers."[146]

Communities considering the HVIP strategy should be aware of the National Network of Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs (NNHVIP), an organization that brings together HVIP programs from across the country and provides information and guidance to those weighing a local HVIP program. NNHVIP provides a variety of resources on its website (**nnhvip.org**), including a practical handbook of best practices for launching and sustaining a HVIP program, as well as on-site and online technical training.

Given the promising results generated by HVIP programs thus far, this innovative violence prevention strategy should be strongly considered by any community suffering from high levels of gun violence. The US Department of Justice has expressly endorsed the HVIP approach. A DOJ initiative known as Defending Childhood issued a report in December 2012 recommending that HVIP programs be made available to all violently injured patients and that HVIP programs be expanded beyond the roughly 20 programs currently funded in American cities.[147] As a result, DOJ is helping to fund the training and capacity-building

efforts of NNHVIP.[148] Community leaders and health professionals considering this strategy should begin by consulting with NNHVIP to learn best practices and receive direct training.

As one report concluded, "The [hospital] is an underutilized resource in our national efforts to reduce violent injury among our nation's youths, and the [hospital] visit is a missed opportunity for detection and intervention with those youths at highest risk for future violent injury and death."[149]

IV. COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH—RICHMOND, CA

A MODEL OF URBAN GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The City of Richmond, CA, located in the Northern California Bay Area, provides an example of a city that has successfully implemented a hybrid approach to gun violence prevention, combining several of the elements discussed above. An ethnically diverse city with a population of 100,000, Richmond has drastically cut homicide rates in recent years by applying a version of the GVI strategy along with elements of the Cure Violence and HVIP models. Importantly, this effort was spearheaded by an innovative, independent city agency dedicated solely to the goal of reducing gun violence. Richmond's successful, holistic approach to gun violence reduction merits close attention.

Richmond's Homicide Problem

In 2007, Richmond was considered one of the most dangerous cities in America, with an extremely high homicide rate of 45.9 per 100,000 residents (compared to an average of 4.8 per 100,000 residents for similarly sized cities in California that same year). As with many urban communities, Richmond's crime data revealed that 88% of homicide victims were male, 73% were black, and more than a third were between 18 and 24 years old. Moreover, an extremely small number of individuals were responsible for roughly 70% of Richmond's firearm violence.[150]

The Office of Neighborhood Safety

In response to this crisis, the city took the innovative step of creating a new city agency, the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS), responsible for "building partnerships and strategies that produce sustained reductions in firearm assaults and related retaliations and deaths in Richmond."[151] Reducing gun violence is the exclusive focus of ONS, an agency that is expressly unaffiliated with local law enforcement. Around the same time

that ONS began implementing its most intensive programs, many of which resemble the CV model, Richmond also started employing the GVI strategy, driven by a partnership among law enforcement, community-based organizations, and local faith leaders.

Impressive Results

The results were extremely compelling. Homicides in Richmond began decreasing in 2010, and by 2013 the city had gone from suffering more than 40 homicides per year to only 16, its lowest number in more than three decades. That trend continued in 2014, a year in which there were only 11 homicides, the lowest figure since 1971.[152] Richmond provides a promising example of the impact that a city can have on gun violence levels by employing a combination of the GVI, CV, and HVIP strategies. Richmond also experimented with several innovative practices that deserve closer examination.

RICHMOND'S COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY

ONS provides what it describes as "targeted intervention services" to those "identified as most likely to be perpetrators and/or victims of gun violence."[153] This is a multipronged approached that combines several strategies.

Richmond's Version of CV

First, similar to the Cure Violence model, ONS employs Neighborhood Change Agents (NCAs) who act as both Outreach Workers and Violence Interrupters rolled into one. NCAs build relationships and direct clients to services, while also intervening and moderating potentially violent situations when they arise.

ONS also employs a number of Peacekeepers, who serve as supplemental Violence Interrupters, supporting the work of the NCAs. Both NCAs and Peacekeepers are generally from the neighborhoods in which they operate and often have escaped the dangerous lifestyle their clients are currently living. As a result, they have the ability to communicate directly to at-risk youth in a way that many others do not.

Operation Peacemaker Fellowship: Intensive Mentoring Program

Second, ONS implements a direct, intensive mentoring program for the most at-risk individuals, called the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship. This innovative program is totally voluntary and lasts 18 months. Participants receive daily contact from NCAs, create a life map of both short-term and long-term goals, have the opportunity to travel outside of Richmond, and are directly connected with social services.

Travel opportunities are important for two reasons. First, many at-risk individuals have never left their neighborhoods. Showing them the wider world opens up their minds and provides a powerful motivation to change. Second, much of the violence in Richmond is retaliatory, and travel opportunities are conditioned upon fellows agreeing to travel with sworn enemies. In this way, old feuds and rivalries can be broken down and replaced with a sense of mutual understanding.

An evaluation of the Peacemaker Fellowship showed resoundingly positive indicators: *94% were alive, 84% had not been shot, and 79% had not been arrested for gun-related activity.*

Participants able to meet a certain percentage of their goals and remain enrolled in the program are eligible to receive modest cash stipends as an additional incentive for continued progress. Finally, participants receive support from regular meetings with an elders' circle that provides intergenerational mentoring.

An evaluation of the Peacemaker Fellowship showed highly positive indicators for participants: as of April 2015, 94% (or 64 out of 68) of fellows were alive, 84% had not sustained a gun-related injury, and 79% had not been arrested for gun-related crimes since becoming fellows.[154] In terms of personal development, the numbers are also promising: since enrolling, 20% of fellows received their GED or high school diploma, 10% enrolled in college or vocational training, and 50% obtained employment at some point during the fellowship.[155] Of course, during the time of implementation, Richmond also saw a dramatic drop in its homicide rate, as discussed above.

As a letter from Congresswoman Barbara Lee's office recently emphasized, "Now, more than ever, African-American communities must reinvest our resources into vulnerable populations, particularly young African-American men. Further, as we look for alternatives to the ills that ravage our neighborhoods, Operation Peacemaker Fellowship exemplifies a model that can be replicated throughout communities nationwide."[156]

Richmond HVIP Strategy and Community Engagement

Third, ONS employs the Beyond the Violence Initiative (BVI), a hospital-based intervention similar to the Wraparound Project discussed above.[157] BVI connects young adults who are in the hospital recovering from firearm-related injuries with culturally competent caseworkers who provide long-term coordination, linkages to community services, home visits, and follow-up assistance. Fourth, ONS works with the Countywide Reentry Planning Initiative, which is targeted at providing services to incarcerated individuals that will be released back into the Richmond community.

Finally, ONS also coordinates a number of other efforts that are aimed at changing neighborhood norms surrounding violence. These efforts include organized polling of local residents to determine their most pressing needs, hosting block parties to build community relationships, and working directly in schools to increase constructive opportunities for children in Richmond.

Richmond's Version of GVI

At the same time it was implementing the programs described above, Richmond also embraced a version of the GVI model. As prescribed by GVI, this program begins by identifying Richmond residents most likely to be at risk of committing or becoming the victims of gun violence. These individuals are invited to a meeting at a neutral location, such as a local high school, where a team of law enforcement officials, local residents, and outreach workers convey a powerful message that the violence needs to stop.[158] Invitees are also told that their lives matter and are offered support and social services. Finally, invitees are warned that future violence will be met with a strong law enforcement response directed at not only the responsible individual, but that individual's group.[159]

Richmond's GVI strategy was first implemented in 2012 and has been credited as one of the leading factors in Richmond's dramatic decrease in gun homicide. In addition, the process has improved police-community relations—for example, one officer commented that, following a homicide, "Witnesses spoke to officers more openly than they would have in past years."[160] That sort of increased collaboration leads to the solving of more homicide cases, which in turn serves to reduce retaliatory killings, creating a virtuous cycle of violence reduction. A Richmond resident described the police-citizen collaboration of Richmond's GVI model as "an end in itself."[161]

Funding

Richmond's comprehensive gun violence prevention efforts are funded with money from the city's general fund, supplemented by state, federal, and philanthropic grants to expand the programs offered. In fiscal year 2013–14, for example, the total ONS budget was $3 million, with roughly half coming from city funds and the other half from state and federal funding, foundation grants, and private donations. Public funds support staff positions and many operating expenses, while private funding sources (e.g., corporate or individual donations) underwrite specific activities and services for the Peacemaker Fellowship including stipends, travel expenses, subsidized internships, and assistance with basic needs.[162]

Success in Stockton, CA

It should be noted that Richmond's experience with this hybrid model has yet to be evaluated in a more rigorous experimental format, but the initial results are quite promising, and other cities have begun implementing a similar model. For example, Stockton, CA, recently created an Office of Violence Prevention that is housed within the City Manager's Office. This office's mission is to "significantly reduce violence in the City of Stockton through the implementation of data-driven, partnership-based violence prevention and reduction programs and strategies rooted in best practices."[163]

Operating in tandem with the Office of Violence Prevention, Stockton has also recently re-implemented the GVI strategy, which had previously shown very promising results in the 1990s, before being discontinued. As with Richmond, Stockton is approaching gun violence using a comprehensive strategy that blends GVI with promising public health-oriented solutions to gun violence. Since implementing these strategies, Stockton has seen a marked decrease in homicides and overall shooting incidents.[164]

Richmond and Stockton provide promising models that other cities should consider emulating to reduce gun violence without worsening mass incarceration levels. As one Richmond law enforcement officer explained, "We've learned that a very small percentage of the people—maybe 1 to 3%—are committing the majority of the violent acts. Instead of impacting that other 97%, we try to focus on the 1 to 3%."[165] In other words, police are targeting specific behavior—violence—rather than entire communities.

NEXT STEPS

For leaders and activists looking to implement effective intervention programs that reduce gun violence without further contributing to mass incarceration, we hope we have provided an important starting point. There are many additional resources available from the National Network for Safe Communities (**nnscommunities.org**), the PICO Network's Live Free Campaign (**livefreeusa.org**), Cure Violence (**cureviolence.org**), and the National Network of Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs (**nnhvip.org**). Cities wanting to do more to prevent gun violence in their neighborhoods should begin by reaching out to these organizations.

Urban gun violence is a complex problem that demands comprehensive solutions. In addition to implementing the interventions discussed above, we must also address the many weaknesses in America's gun laws, which allow crime guns to flow all too easily into the most vulnerable communities. The following chapter identifies the legal reforms that are most needed to help keep these communities safe.

POLICY SOLUTIONS

POLICY SOLUTIONS
SMART GUN LAWS SAVE LIVES

One of the key factors fueling gun violence in impoverished urban communities is easy access to firearms. Fortunately, there are a number of policies designed to lower the supply of crime guns in cities. Where implemented, smart gun laws have had a measurable impact on gun violence rates, saving lives and making communities safer.

In California, for example, many gun safety reforms have been enacted over the past two decades, with impressive results. Between 1993 and 2013, the state reduced its overall gun death rate by more than 56%, double the reduction seen in the rest of the country during those years.[166]

Part of the problem, however, is that state and local gun laws are too often undermined by weak laws in nearby states.

Take Chicago, a city with truly unacceptable rates of gun violence. As a state, Illinois has enacted fairly comprehensive firearm regulations—the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence gave it a B+ in its *2015 Gun Law State Scorecard* (**gunlawscorecard.org**).

Yet these laws can only do so much: *more than half* of the guns used to commit crimes in Chicago are trafficked from neighboring states, particularly Indiana, which does very little to regulate firearms (and subsequently scored a D-).[167] To stem the tide of gun trafficking, citizens of states with weak laws must advocate for meaningful reform and political leaders must understand how their failure to regulate firearms has deadly consequences that are disproportionately felt in nearby urban communities.

The following section outlines the most effective policies for reducing gun violence and stemming the flow of firearms to at-risk neighborhoods. It should be noted at the outset that these smart gun laws enjoy strong support from a majority of Americans, according to recent polling.[168]

This section covers the following policy solutions:

- **Universal background checks**
- **Permit to purchase and gun licensing requirements**
- **Minimum age restrictions**
- **Prohibiting "junk guns"**
- **Better regulating firearms dealers to reduce gun trafficking**
- **Limiting bulk purchases of handguns**
- **Requiring gun owners to report lost or stolen firearms**
- **Prohibiting large capacity magazines**
- **Encouraging "smart gun" technology that prevents unauthorized use**
- **Microstamping bullets to assist in solving crimes**

While this chapter provides a general overview of these policies, more detailed information about these and many other gun laws can be found on the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence's website, smartgunlaws.org.

I. UNIVERSAL BACKGROUND CHECKS

Mandatory universal background checks for all gun purchases is one of the strongest legal approaches to reducing gun violence in all communities. Federal law only requires licensed dealers, and not unlicensed "private" sellers, to conduct background checks on purchasers to ensure that they are eligible to purchase guns.[169] A 1997 report for the National Institute of Justice estimated that about 40% of gun sales occur through unlicensed sellers without a background check, and new work by Harvard researchers confirms this startling figure.[170]

This gap in federal law—commonly referred to as the *private sale loophole*—makes it all too easy for sellers to transfer guns to people who are otherwise prohibited from possessing firearms due to criminal histories, domestic violence protective orders, or prior involuntary commitments related to mental illness.

Gun offenders overwhelmingly obtain their guns through unlicensed sales. A survey of gun offender prison inmates in 13 states found that only 13% obtained their crime gun from a gun store, where background checks are required by law. Nearly all (96%) of those inmates who were ineligible to possess a gun at the time of their crime obtained the firearm through a private, unlicensed seller.[171] In other words, not requiring background checks on private firearm sales makes it much, much easier for guns to end up in the wrong hands.

Background checks work by requiring all sellers to verify that a buyer is eligible to possess firearms before finalizing the sale. The majority of these checks are completed within minutes, and when properly utilized, the background check system works well. Currently, though, only 18 states and the District of Columbia require a background check on all handgun sales, including unlicensed sales at gun shows and over the internet.[172]

In states with universal background checks:

- **64% fewer guns are trafficked for use in out-of-state crimes.**
- **39% fewer police officers are killed with handguns.**
- **38% fewer women are shot and killed by their intimate partners.**
- **49% fewer people commit suicide with a gun.**
- **There are 17% fewer aggravated assaults with guns.**[173]

What happens when background checks are not conducted on private sales? In 2007, Missouri repealed its requirement that all handgun purchasers obtain a permit after passing a background check.

Since Missouri's background check law was repealed:

- **Gun murders in the state have risen nearly 25%.**
- **The share of crime guns recovered in Missouri that were originally purchased within the state has grown by 25%.**
- **A key indicator of crime gun trafficking—the share of crime guns recovered within two years of their original sale—has doubled.**[174]

Requiring universal background checks is a policy supported by an overwhelming 84% of the American people, including gun owners.[175] Even 74% of NRA members support universal background checks.[176] At this point, the primary obstacle to the adoption of this lifesaving policy is strong resistance by the gun lobby leadership, and a vocal, highly motivated minority of people who oppose any regulation of firearms whatsoever.

Americans need to make their voice heard on this issue. Ballot initiatives may provide a way for state-level activists to bypass the gun lobby and bring a vote directly to the people. In 2014, a ballot initiative requiring universal background checks in Washington State passed by a large majority.[177] Similar measures will be on the ballot in 2016 in states like Nevada and Maine.[178]

Universal background checks have a demonstrated impact and offer a straightforward way to combat gun violence, particularly in urban centers that suffer disproportionately from this public health epidemic.

For a more detailed discussion of universal background checks, see the Law Center's toolkit, *Commonsense Solutions: State Laws to Expand Background Checks for Unlicensed Gun Sales*, available at **smartgunlaws.org/commonsense-solutions-background-checks**.

II. PERMIT TO PURCHASE LAWS

Firearm licensing laws facilitate responsible gun ownership by requiring a person to obtain a state-issued permit to purchase (PTP) or possess a gun. Although PTP laws vary, the most comprehensive systems require all gun owners to possess a permit and renew it regularly.[179] These permits may only be issued or renewed after the applicant has undergone a background check, completed safety training, and passed written and performance-based tests showing that the applicant knows how to safely load, fire, and store a gun.

PTP laws are one method for closing the private sale loophole and ensuring that every person who purchases or possesses a gun has undergone a background check. Requiring periodic license renewal can also help law enforcement confirm that a gun owner remains eligible to possess firearms and help facilitate the removal of firearms from those who have become ineligible.

According to recent research, "The type of firearm policy most consistently associated with curtailing the diversion of guns to criminals and for which some evidence indicates protective effects against gun violence is PTP for handguns."[180] This is underscored by a study of Missouri, which, as discussed above, repealed its PTP law in 2007. Controlling for other factors, an in-depth study of crime patterns in the state showed a 25% increase in firearm homicide rates in the five-year period following the policy change—a time when homicide levels were declining or holding steady in the

rest of the nation.[181] Moreover, the percentage of recovered crime guns that originated within the state increased dramatically, suggesting that the repeal of the PTP law made it much easier for crime guns to be purchased guns in Missouri. Given the disproportionate rate of gun violence in poor inner-city areas, this increase in homicide was likely felt most acutely by minority communities.

By the same token, Connecticut enacted a PTP law in 1996, over the opposition of critics who argued that the law would have no impact on gun crime and would only inconvenience law-abiding gun owners.[182] A 2015 study showed that, in fact, the change in policy was associated with "a 40% reduction in Connecticut's firearm homicide rates during the first 10 years that the law was in place."[183]

Of the 10 states with the lowest gun death rates in America, *eight have some form of permit to purchase law on the books.*

Based on these findings, it is not surprising that of the 10 states with the lowest gun death rates in America, eight have some form of permit to purchase law on the books. At present, only 14 states have some form of PTP laws in place. As the communities most impacted by day-to-day gun homicide, impoverished minority neighborhoods stand to benefit immensely from the enactment of PTP laws that are associated with such a drastic decrease in gun homicide rates.

Urban gun violence is fueled by easy access to firearms, and evidence shows that PTP laws are also associated with lower levels of in-state crime gun trafficking. As one study concluded, "The share of crime guns that originated from in-state retail sales in states with both PTP policies and handgun registration was, on average, 37 percentage points lower relative to the comparison states lacking either policy," after controlling for various factors.[184] In other words, PTP laws force would-be shooters to find out-of-state gun suppliers, making it less likely—or at least more expensive—for such individuals to successfully obtain a firearm.

Given the strong association between PTP laws and lowered firearm homicide rates and levels of in-state crime gun trafficking, these laws are a solution that must be considered in states struggling with high rates of gun violence.

III. MINIMUM AGE LAWS

Gun violence rates are disproportionately high among young people: every day in the US, guns cause the deaths of nine people under the age of 21.[185] In 2010 alone, 3,459 people under age 21 died from gunshot wounds. Of these deaths, 2,329 were classified as homicides, 936 as suicides, and 150 as unintentional shootings.[186]

The rate of gun homicide victimization among black Americans is much higher than the rate among whites across all age groups, but is particularly stark among young adults.[187] **Firearm homicide is the leading cause of death for black males ages 15–34.** Laws that decrease access to guns within this age group are more likely to reduce gun violence in impoverished, urban communities of color. Unfortunately, federal laws and many state laws in this area are incredibly weak.

Federal law, for example, prohibits licensed dealers from selling handguns to those under the age of 21, but private sellers, whose sales constitute roughly 40% of all firearm transactions, may sell handguns to individuals over the age of 18.[188] When it comes to long guns, there are no federal age restrictions on either licensed dealers or private sellers.[189] These age limitations also apply to the sale of ammunition, however, there is no federal requirement that ammunition sellers check a buyer's identification to confirm the purchaser's age, so sellers are not incentivized to make sure that prospective purchasers of ammunition are old enough to do so.[190]

Only a handful of states have age requirements for gun sales that are more restrictive than federal law, and this makes it far too easy for young adults living in urban communities to legally purchase firearms.[191] As an illustration of this, a survey of convicted gun offenders in 13 states found that nearly a quarter of them would have been prohibited from obtaining firearms at the time of the crime if the minimum legal age for possessing any type of firearm was 21 years.[192]

A few states have enacted laws that prevent the transfer of guns to people under 21.[193] In Illinois, for example, a person must obtain a Firearm Owners Identification or "FOID" card in order to lawfully purchase or possess a firearm, and a firearm seller must ensure that a purchaser has a FOID card. Persons must be 21 or older to be eligible to obtain a FOID card, or have written consent of a parent or guardian.[194]

Laws such as this one can play an important role in reducing young people's access to guns. As discussed above, this is the demographic that is most at risk to both perpetrate and become the victims of gun violence in poor urban communities. Yet only

12 states and the District of Columbia have established 21 as the minimum legal age for purchasing any handgun, including from an unlicensed seller.[195] The few existing state laws addressing this issue are undermined when nearby states allow unlicensed sellers to sell handguns to people under age 21 without restriction, as is the case in Chicago, where more than half of all crime guns come from nearby states with weaker laws.[196] Keeping guns out of the hands of people too young to handle them responsibly is an important component of an overall legal strategy to lower the rates of gun violence in urban areas.

IV. PROHIBITING JUNK GUNS

Another important legal strategy for reducing access to firearms for at-risk populations is to regulate the availability of cheap, unreliable handguns, also known as "junk guns" and "Saturday Night Specials."[197] These low-quality handguns are often composed of inferior metals or plastic and designed to unreasonably reduce manufacturing costs. Broadly speaking, these handguns are cheap, easily concealed, and more likely to misfire or malfunction than other firearms.

Junk guns play a significant role in criminal misuse, especially by young adults.[198] As an example, in the one year following a gun dealer's decision to stop selling junk guns, the number of guns sold by the dealer that were later linked to crime dropped by 73%.[199] Yet federal law imposes no design safety standards on domestically produced firearms.[200] As a result, many firearms are manufactured and sold in the US without undergoing appropriate safety testing or including basic safety features.

California's experience with junk gun regulation is particularly telling. In the 1980s and 1990s, many junk guns were produced by the so-called "Ring of Fire" companies—a small group of gun manufacturers originally based in the Los Angeles area.[201] After steadily increasing production during the 1980s, Ring of Fire companies manufactured one-third of all US handguns produced in the early 1990s. Five of the 10 crime guns most frequently traced by ATF in 2000 originated from the Ring of Fire.[202]

Numerous experts criticized the low quality of the guns produced by these companies in terms of design, lack of basic safety features, materials, and performance. Because these guns were so poorly constructed, inaccurate, and unreliable, they were widely considered inappropriate for either personal protection or sporting purposes.[203]

In 1999, California responded to this public health threat by adopting safety standards for all handguns, including prohibiting the sale of firearms that cannot meet those standards. By 2003, five of the six original Ring of Fire companies had declared

bankruptcy, greatly reducing access to junk guns at a time when California's overall gun death rate was dropping significantly.[204]

Experience in other states confirms the efficacy of enacting handgun design safety standards. When Maryland banned the sale of junk guns, a 2002 study found that such guns were much less likely to be used in crime in Baltimore than in other cities,[205] and that the enactment of the law was associated with an impressive 8 to 11% reduction in gun homicides—**an average of 40 lives saved per year directly associated with a single policy change**.[206]

Creating firearm design safety standards to prevent cheap, poorly made handguns from flooding inner-city markets is a critical strategy for protecting our most at-risk communities. However, at present, only seven states and the District of Columbia have laws in place to regulate safety design standards for firearms.[207] Ensuring handguns adhere to safety standards is a policy solution that must be enacted in a greater number of states and, in order to be most effective, at the federal level.

V. CURBING GUN TRAFFICKING

REGULATING GUN DEALERS

The proper oversight of gun dealers is a vital element in reducing easy access to firearms in urban communities. All firearms initially enter the consumer market through gun dealers, who are the critical link between manufacturers or distributors and the general public. Even though all guns that are sold to the public, including guns that end up recovered in crimes, originate with dealers, dealers are not currently subject to adequate federal and state oversight.[208]

While the vast majority of gun dealers are law-abiding, a small number of dealers represent a major source of illegally trafficked firearms. For example, an ATF report analyzing crime gun trace data in the 1990s made the startling finding that 1% of licensed firearm dealers accounted for more than *half* of all traced crime guns.[209] By focusing on the small number of gun dealers that supply the most crime guns, law enforcement can reduce the supply of illegal guns in order to better protect residents of violence-stricken urban areas.

Currently, ATF faces numerous obstacles that enable the small percentage of corrupt dealers to go undetected and unpunished. For example, by law, ATF may conduct only one unannounced inspection of each dealer per year. In addition, the burden of proof for

prosecutions and license revocations is extremely high and serious violations of the laws regulating dealers are generally classified as misdemeanors rather than felonies. Federal law even prevents ATF from using electronic records, greatly inhibiting its ability to do its job efficiently and effectively.[210]

In addition, ATF has historically been grossly underfunded and understaffed.[211] A *Washington Post* investigation in 2010 found that, as a result of inadequate staffing, ATF was able to inspect less than 10% of FFLs in 2009 and, on average, gun dealers are inspected only once a decade.[212] This leaves urban communities, which are often the destination of illegal trafficked firearms and are disproportionately impacted by gun violence, particularly vulnerable.

ATF was able to inspect less than 10% of federally licensed firearms dealers in 2009. *On average, gun dealers are inspected only once a decade.*

Given the current weaknesses in federal law, action at the state level to regulate dealers is essential. At present, 25 states have laws regulating firearms dealers in one form or another, from requiring dealers to conduct background checks, retain records of sales, and/or report certain sales to law enforcement. For example, nine states require firearms dealers to utilize security measures to reduce the risk of guns being stolen from their premises.[213]

Requiring the videotaping of gun sales would help to further incentivize sellers to follow the rules. Prior studies have shown that lawsuits brought against gun dealers who have facilitated blatantly illegal purchases significantly reduced the diversion of guns to criminals.[214] Although the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA), enacted by Congress in 2005 to provide special legal protections to gun dealers and manufacturers, makes it more difficult to successfully bring such lawsuits,[215] video evidence of a licensed gun dealer refusing to follow the law is very difficult for a court to ignore. A recently successful $6 million negligence lawsuit against Badger Guns in Wisconsin illustrates that video evidence of negligent sales practices provide one way to clear the legal hurdles created by PLCAA.[216]

A September 2010 report by Mayors Against Illegal Guns concluded that routine inspections of gun dealers provide law enforcement with more opportunities to "detect potential indications of illegal gun activity, including improper recordkeeping or a dealer whose gun inventory does not match their sales records."[217] The report presented data showing that states that do not permit or require inspections of gun dealers are the

sources of crime guns recovered in other states at a rate 50% greater than states that do permit or require such inspections. In other words, crime guns flow from states with weak dealer regulations to other states, where they are ultimately used to wreak havoc.[218]

Similarly, a 2009 study found that cities in states that comprehensively regulate retail firearms dealers—where dealers undergo regular compliance inspections—have significantly lower levels of gun trafficking than other cities.[219] Properly regulating gun dealers is one of the keys to stemming the flow of crime guns to impoverished, urban communities. To find out more about what city, state, and federal leaders should be doing to better regulate gun dealers, visit the Law Center's Dealer Regulations Policy Summary, available at **smartgunlaws.org/dealer-regulations-policy-summary**.

LIMITING THE PURCHASE OF MULTIPLE HANDGUNS

Laws limiting an individual's ability to purchase multiple handguns within a short span of time reduce handgun trafficking. Given the disproportionate role of handguns as the weapon of choice for committing violent crimes in impoverished urban communities, limiting the number of these weapons that may be purchased at a given time shows great promise for stemming the flow of handguns into vulnerable neighborhoods.

Interstate firearms trafficking flourishes, in part, because states regulate firearm sales differently and there is no federal limitation on the number of guns that an individual may purchase at any one time.[220] States with weaker laws attract gun traffickers who make multiple purchases and then resell those guns in states with stronger laws. The final destination of trafficked firearms is often impoverished urban areas that are already replete with gun violence. As one gun trafficker, who purchased multiple firearms in Georgia to distribute in New York City, admitted during an investigation, "When I'm out of state, like in Atlanta and Georgia and all that, it's all legal, but in New York, it's completely illegal."[221]

Handguns sold in multiple sales, meaning the sale of two or more guns to the same purchaser within five business days, are more frequently used in crime. ATF studies of trace data have demonstrated that at least 20% of all handguns recovered in crimes were originally purchased as part of a multiple sale.[222] As further evidence of this, a study of the sale and subsequent criminal use of handguns sold in Maryland in the 1990s revealed that handguns sold in multiple sales accounted for about a quarter of crime guns and were up to 64% more likely to be used in crime than handguns sold in single sales.[223]

Virginia's experience with a one-gun-a-month law demonstrates the positive effect that such laws can have on gun trafficking patterns. Virginia's one-gun-a-month law—which was in effect from 1993 to 2012 and prohibited the purchase of more than one handgun

per person in any 30-day period—significantly reduced the number of crime guns traced to Virginia dealers.[224] Virginia initially enacted the law after the state became recognized as a primary source of crime guns recovered in the northeast. In 1991, for example, ATF found that 40% of the more than 1,200 crime guns recovered in New York had been purchased in Virginia. After Virginia enacted its one-gun-a-month law, the odds of tracing a crime gun to a Virginia gun dealer dropped by 71% for crime guns recovered in New York, 72% for crime guns recovered in Massachusetts, and 66% for guns recovered in New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts combined.[225]

Currently, only three states—California, Maryland, and New Jersey—and the District of Columbia have such laws on the books.[226] Limiting multiple handgun purchases in more states and at the federal level would serve to greatly reduce the flow of crime guns to America's most vulnerable urban centers.

REPORTING LOST OR STOLEN GUNS

Laws that require firearm owners to report lost or stolen firearms could further reduce gun violence rates in urban communities by helping to deter gun trafficking.[227] Such laws also help law enforcement disarm individuals who become ineligible to possess firearms.

Laws requiring the reporting of lost or stolen guns deter gun trafficking by providing law enforcement with indicators that a firearm has been trafficked. When a gun is found at a crime scene and traced back to the original purchaser, that individual may falsely claim that the gun was lost or stolen to hide his or her involvement in trafficking.

Reporting laws put law enforcement on notice of individuals who repeatedly:

1. **Fail to file reports yet claim that their guns were lost or stolen after they are recovered from a crime scene.**
2. **Report their guns lost or stolen, indicating that the person may be trafficking firearms.**[228]

In addition, reporting laws help disarm persons prohibited from possessing firearms. When a person who legally owned a gun falls into a prohibited category, it is crucial for law enforcement to be able to remove the firearm from his or her possession.

For example, a gun owner who becomes the subject of a domestic violence restraining order is not permitted under federal law to continue to possess firearms. However, when ordered to surrender a firearm by law enforcement or a judge, the owner may falsely claim it has been lost or stolen. Mandatory reporting laws help deter this behavior.

Stolen guns are a major source for weapons traffickers. Data from ATF indicates that approximately 173,000 guns were reported lost or stolen by people other than federally licensed dealers in 2012.[229] Yet survey research indicates that at least 500,000 firearms are actually stolen from residences each year.[230] This discrepancy shows that most lost or stolen firearms are not reported. Many stolen guns are subsequently used to commit crimes. A Treasury Department study revealed that nearly a quarter of ATF gun trafficking investigations involved stolen firearms and were associated with over 11,000 trafficked firearms. Ten percent of these stolen firearm investigations involved guns stolen from residences.[231]

Approximately 173,000 guns were reported lost or stolen in 2012.
Yet survey research indicates at least 500,000 firearms are actually stolen from residences each year.

Federal law does not require individual gun owners or other lawful possessors of firearms to report the loss or theft of a firearm to law enforcement. Federal law does, however, require licensed firearm dealers to report the loss or theft of any firearm from the dealer's inventory to the US Attorney General or local law enforcement within 48 hours of discovering the loss or theft.[232]

Significantly, laws requiring the reporting of lost and stolen firearms are associated with a reduction in gun trafficking. One study found that states without mandatory lost or stolen reporting laws export 2.5 times more crime guns across state lines than jurisdictions with such laws.[233] These laws also enjoy broad public support: a nationwide poll in 2011 found that 94% of Americans surveyed favor laws to require the reporting of lost or stolen firearms.[234]

In the words of one recent public health study analyzing the effects of anti-trafficking laws, "Mounting evidence indicates that certain laws intended to increase the accountability of firearm sellers to avoid risky transfers of firearms are effective in curtailing the diversion of guns to criminals, in particular the more rigorous PTP handgun laws, comprehensive background checks, strong regulation and oversight of gun dealers, and laws requiring gun owners to promptly report lost or stolen firearms."[235]

Putting these common-sense policies in place at the state and federal level—and enforcing them in a comprehensive manner—will undoubtedly stem the flow of crime guns to embattled urban neighborhoods and help save lives.

VI. LARGE CAPACITY MAGAZINES

Large capacity magazines (LCMs), some of which can hold up to 100 rounds of ammunition, significantly increase a shooter's ability to injure and kill large numbers of people quickly. This is because those magazines enable the shooter to fire repeatedly without needing to stop and reload. The time required to reload can be critical in creating an opportunity for victims to escape and for law enforcement or others to intervene. The vast majority of urban gun violence is committed with handguns,[236] and when a handgun is equipped with an LCM, it becomes even more deadly.

In a study of recent shooting events with multiple victims, the use of LCMs was associated with 135% more people shot and 57% more killed, compared to other multi-victim shootings.[237] Reducing access to LCMs will decrease the lethality of shootings in urban areas, making it less likely that bystanders will be hit and multiple parties shot and killed in a given attack.

LCMs are a relatively new phenomenon. Prior to the 1980s, the most popular type of handgun was the revolver, which typically holds six rounds of ammunition in a rotating cylinder. During the 1980s, however, the firearms industry began mass producing and marketing semi-automatic pistols, which can accept LCMs.[238] By 1994, firearms equipped with LCMs were being used in up to a quarter of all gun crimes.[239]

In response to this, and to a shockingly high rate of general gun violence in America, Congress passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which made it "unlawful for a person to manufacture, transfer, or possess" LCMs (although this exempted the many LCMs already in circulation prior to the law's enactment).[240] The law included a sunset clause, however, and was allowed expired 10 years later, in 2004, despite overwhelming public support for its renewal.

Even though the federal LCM prohibition was limited in scope and duration, various studies show that it resulted in a marked decrease in the use of large capacity ammunition magazines in crime—and a corresponding increase when the law was allowed to expire. **A *Washington Post* study analyzed data kept by the Virginia State Police and found a clear decline in the percentage of crime guns that were equipped with LCMs after the federal ban was enacted.** The percentage reached a low of 10% in 2004 and then steadily climbed after Congress allowed the ban to expire; by 2010, the percentage was close to 22%.[241] Similarly, since the federal LCM ban expired in 2004, the Los Angeles Police Department has recovered significantly greater numbers of LCMs, from 38 in 2003 to anywhere from 151 to 940 each year between 2004 and 2010.[242]

As a result of the expiration of the federal LCM prohibition in 2004, LCMs are now legal to purchase and possess unless otherwise prohibited by state or local law. At present, only eight states and the District of Columbia have enacted laws banning LCMs.[243] In order to reduce the lethality of the handguns being used to devastate urban communities of color, a strong call should be made for the renewal of the federal LCM prohibition.

VII. TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

SMART GUN TECHNOLOGY

As President Obama recognized on January 4, 2016, while announcing a series of executive actions designed to reduce gun violence, "Tens of thousands of people are injured or killed by firearms every year—in many cases by guns that were sold legally but then stolen, misused, or discharged accidentally. Developing and promoting technology that would help prevent these tragedies is an urgent priority."[244]

Recent technological advances have the potential to prevent the unauthorized operation of guns, thereby reducing the use of firearms in gun-related crimes. **Smart guns, also known as owner-authorized guns, incorporate technology preventing their operation except by authorized users.**

The technology incorporated into these firearms can generally be divided into two categories: *token-based technologies*, which use a ring or watch to activate the firearm, and *biometric technologies*, which utilize unique features of the user.[245]

In response to an earlier order from President Obama, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) produced a report in June 2013 evaluating the readiness of personalized firearm technology. The report found that, although personalized guns were not yet available commercially, numerous prototypes had been created and at least three models of these firearms could be described as "commercializable" or "production-ready."[246] At least one personalized handgun system entered the US market in 2013: the Armatix iP1, which includes a handgun and a watch containing a radio frequency identifier that the user must wear to activate the handgun.[247] The gun lobby, however, has pushed back strongly against the introduction or development of this potentially lifesaving technology.[248]

Smart gun technology can help to reduce overall gun-related crime rates by confining use to lawful, responsible owners. For example, as noted above, stolen guns are a large source of trafficked firearms and survey data indicates that more than half a million firearms are stolen annually from residences.[249] A stolen firearm equipped with the

proper smart gun technology, however, would be worthless on the secondary market, and unable to be used in the further commission of a crime. This has the potential to create a serious reduction of gun violence in at-risk urban communities.

At present, only Maryland, Massachusetts, and New Jersey have laws addressing and encouraging the use of smart gun technology. One organization, the Smart Tech Challenges Foundation (**smarttechfoundation.org**), has begun providing grants to innovators looking to develop smart guns and other firearm safety technologies, with the goal of helping bring those products to market. President Obama's executive action encouraging smart guns is a step in the right direction, but more needs to be done at the federal and state level to ensure that this technology becomes available to consumers.

BALLISTIC IDENTIFICATION AND MICROSTAMPING

Recent technological advances could enable law enforcement to conduct more targeted investigations into gun crimes, improving the chances of solving gun-related homicides and attacks. All firearms leave markings on the cartridge cases they expel when fired.[250] Ballistic identification and microstamping technology make it possible to link cartridge cases recovered at crime scenes to the gun that fired them, making it easier to solve crimes. Increasing the solve-rate for shootings helps to deter gun violence generally and reduces the perception that retaliatory, vigilante-style acts of violence are necessary in order to obtain justice, especially in underserved urban communities where such crimes are more likely to occur.[251]

Comprehensive ballistic identification systems (sometimes called ballistic fingerprinting) require manufacturers to test-fire the guns they produce and store images of the ballistic markings left on cartridge cases in a database so that law enforcement can later determine whether a particular gun fired a particular cartridge.

ATF's National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) currently provides Integrated Ballistic Identification System (IBIS) equipment to numerous state and local law enforcement agencies nationwide.[252] IBIS equipment is used to compare images of bullets and cartridge cases found at crime scenes to ballistic images previously entered into the NIBIN database. Regarding NIBIN, ATF has concluded that "numerous violent crimes involving firearms have been solved through use of the system, many of which would not have been solved without it."[253]

Microstamping is a newer technology that utilizes lasers to make precise, microscopic engravings on the internal mechanisms of a semiautomatic pistol, such as the breech face and firing pin. When the gun is fired, a unique alphanumeric code identifying the gun's make, model and serial number is stamped on to the cartridge case.[254]

Microstamping gives law enforcement a significant new investigative tool to solve gun-related crimes.[255] When a cartridge case has been engraved with a code through microstamping, the code allows law enforcement to connect the cartridge case directly to the gun that fired it, much like the license plate on a vehicle allows law enforcement to identify the vehicle's make, model, and VIN. Studies show that semi-automatic pistols equipped with microstamping technology produce a significant amount of ballistic evidence that would not be produced otherwise.[256]

In addition to assisting in the investigation and prosecution of gun crimes, this cutting-edge technology has an additional preventative effect: it can deter gun trafficking. Traffickers often buy guns intending to transfer them to someone else illegally. A trafficker who purchases a gun for this purpose would be on notice that the cartridge case could be used to trace the gun back to him or her if the gun were to be used in a crime.

Both ballistic identification and microstamping systems help law enforcement investigate gun crimes because cartridge cases are much more likely to be recovered at the scene of a shooting than the gun itself.[257] These systems can identify the gun a cartridge case was fired from without recovering the gun.[258] Microstamping systems are more efficient, however, because they rely on alphanumeric codes unique to each firearm.

Federal law does not require or address ballistic identification or microstamping. California was the first state to adopt a law requiring all new handguns sold in the state to be equipped with microstamping technology. That law went into effect on May 17, 2013.[259] The wider adoption of such technologies could greatly contribute to the solving of gun crimes and the overall reduction of gun violence in high-crime urban neighborhoods.

NEXT STEPS

The policies outlined in this section will make a substantial difference in the fight to end the crisis of urban gun violence. At present, only a handful of states have enacted these legal solutions, and there's much work to be done. Visit **smartgunlaws.org** today to find out what laws are in place in your state and take action by contacting your elected officials and expressing support for these lifesaving policies.

Legislators wishing to implement these solutions should contact the Law Center to access a wealth of information, including model legislation and pending bill analysis. Only through concerted political action will we be able to reform the shamefully weak gun laws that fuel the epidemic of gun violence in America.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION
MOVING FORWARD, TOGETHER

The conversation about gun violence in America must acknowledge and address the daily, devasting shootings that occur in urban communities of color. It is unconscionable that so many Americans live in neighborhoods as deadly as active warzones. This is a crisis that we as a nation have a collective duty to address.

While the problem of urban gun violence may seem overwhelming, the good news is that proven solutions already exist. The programs and policies identified and described in these pages have achieved tangible results in the most impacted communities. Many of these solutions are driven by the important insight that the vast majority of gun violence in a given area is driven by an extremely small and readily identifiable population.

Focusing resources on this population—including support services and not just law enforcement attention—has yielded tremendous results in many different cities across America. Combining these programs with legal reforms proven to reduce the supply of crime guns will have an even greater impact.

In other words, we already know what works. What we need most now is vocal public support and advocacy for the long-term implementation of the programs and policies that will dramatically reduce gun violence in our cities.

To be sure, this effort will require a significant investment of public resources. Yet this investment will be miniscule next to the enormous cost of gun violence, both in terms of dollars—$229 billion per year—and in raw human suffering that is beyond measure. This

tremendous burden is shouldered by all Americans. That's why working together to end the cycle of urban gun violence is our shared moral obligation and will yield benefits for all Americans. By addressing this problem, we will reduce the inordinate medical and legal costs imposed by gun violence and help revitalize underserved urban communities, where economic opportunity is too often suppressed by a climate of violence (which is in turn driven by a lack of economic opportunity). Most importantly, we will save thousands of precious lives.

We know what needs to be done. It is now time to take decisive action.

The Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence and the PICO National Network are dedicated to providing additional research and analysis in the fight to end gun violence within our hardest-hit communities. We are committed to working with a wide array of partners to identify and support innovative, intelligent strategies for protecting all communities from the devastating impact of gun violence. Together, we can make our cities safe for everyone.

To learn more about how to get involved, visit smartgunlaws.org or piconetwork.org.

KEY RESOURCES

KEY RESOURCES

In the course of creating *Healing Communities in Crisis*, the Law Center and PICO referenced an enormous wealth of useful resources, all of which are carefully documented in the endnotes. For easy reference, here is a brief list of the some of the most helpful starting points for those wanting to learn more about the programs and policies that can truly make an impact on urban gun violence.

INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

California Partnership for Safe Communities
thecapartnership.org

Cities United
citiesunited.org

The City of Richmond, CA, Office of Neighborhood Safety
ci.richmond.ca.us/271/Office-of-Neighborhood-Safety

Cure Violence
cureviolence.org

National Network for Safe Communities
nnscommunities.org

National Network of Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs
nnhvip.org

YouthAlive!
youthalive.org

FAITH-BASED GROUPS

Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence
faithsagainstgunviolence.org

PICO National Network
piconetwork.org

PICO Network's Live Free Campaign
livefreeusa.org

POLICY ORGANIZATIONS

Americans for Responsible Solutions
americansforresponsiblesolutions.org

Center for American Progress
americanprogress.org

Everytown for Gun Safety
everytown.org

Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence
smartgunlaws.org

Violence Policy Center
vpc.org

GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

CDC Injury Prevention and Control: Data and Statistics
cdc.gov/injury/wisqars

National Institute of Justice, Crime Solutions
crimesolutions.gov

NIJ Topics: Gun Violence Prevention
nij.gov/topics/crime/gun-violence/prevention

Project Safe Neighborhoods
psn.org

BOOKS

Michelle Alexander
The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

Antony A. Braga
Problem-Oriented Policing and Crime Prevention

Philip J. Cook and Kristin A. Goss
The Gun Debate: What Everyone Needs to Know

Philip J. Cook and Jens Ludwig
Gun Violence: The Real Costs

David M. Kennedy
Don't Shoot: One Man, A Street Fellowship, and the End of Violence in Inner-City America

Jill Leovy
Ghettoside: A True Story of Murder in America

Daniel W. Webster and Jon S. Vernick
Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis

ENDNOTES

ENDNOTES

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