

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 7, 2023

The Honorable Shalanda D. Young
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Young:

As you prepare the Administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Budget Request, we urge you to use this budget to accelerate efforts to prevent gun violence and help save lives in Chicago and across the country.

For too long, shootings and homicides have plagued Chicago and communities throughout the nation. In 2021, at the height of the pandemic, a rise in the number of shootings in Chicago left more people dead than in any single year in a quarter century, according to statistics released by the Chicago Police Department. Chicago had 697 total homicides in 2022, more than Philadelphia (516), New York City (438), Houston (435), and Los Angeles (382). Preventing future gun violence is of paramount importance.

As of September 17, Americans have experienced more than 500 mass shootings this year alone. Babies born the year of the Columbine massacre are now 24-years-old, and gun violence has become the leading cause of death for children ages 1-19. There is no young person alive today who knows an America without the threat of deadly gun violence.

We applaud the White House for the creation of the Office of Gun Violence Prevention and for the Administration's continued efforts to establish common-sense gun laws. Homicides and shootings are on the decline in Chicago this year, in part because of intentional investments in gun violence prevention efforts. Funding in the President's FY 2025 Budget Request should signal support for Chicago and other cities to continue these efforts.

While the gun violence epidemic is a complex challenge that no single line item can solve, funding the programs outlined below holds the promise of delivering meaningful benefits to communities in Chicago and across the United States.

Housing and Economic Development

Violence in Chicago is often concentrated in communities with higher unemployment and years of neglect and disinvestment. The federal government can help stabilize these neighborhoods by ensuring access to safe, affordable housing and good paying jobs and by encouraging economic and community development. Increasing funding for the HOME

Investment Partnerships Program—the largest federal block grant designed exclusively to create affordable housing for low-income households—will help provide housing in areas where there is access to quality education and jobs. The HOME program provides thousands of low-income and moderate-income families in Chicago with affordable housing. Further investment in programs like the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, Community Development Block Grants, and the Housing Capital Fund will help revitalize neighborhoods, attracting businesses and creating jobs. Providing reliable access to job opportunities is crucial, which is why more federal funding for programs such as the Areas of Persistent Poverty Program is needed to modernize and expand public transportation.

Job Opportunities

When young people are chronically unemployed, it increases the likelihood that they will become involved in crime. Data shows that the pandemic had a more pronounced impact on both jobless, and jobless and out-of-school rates for young people in Chicago and Illinois than for the U.S. overall. Black and Latino youth experienced an uneven recovery toward pre-pandemic levels, and in some cases, no recovery at all. We urge you to prioritize important youth mentoring and job training programs at the U.S. Departments of Labor, Justice, and Education that pursue innovative strategies for connecting young people to career pathways. We also urge you to strengthen mentoring and violence prevention initiatives at the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and to boost funding for recidivism reduction programs.

Education

Quality education is the cornerstone of economic opportunity, and it is important to start early for it to be cost-effective and have the greatest impact. The first five years of a child's life are crucial for development, and we urge you to make strong federal investments in high-quality early childhood education, such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start, Early Head Start, and Preschool Development Grants, which prepare historically underserved children with a strong foundation to succeed in school and life. While I am pleased to see that investments in child care have increased in recent years, additional funding is needed. For example, in Illinois, 37 percent of children from birth to the age of 6 are eligible for a CCDBG subsidy; however, of those eligible children, less than 10 percent are served due to insufficient federal funding.

Research shows that low school attendance and engagement rates can negatively impact a student's academic performance and serve as an indicator for increased involvement in the criminal justice system. We also urge you to support resources for Illinois' highest-need K-12 students through expanded investments in Titles I and IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Title I provides federal resources to schools with high concentrations of low-income students. Title IV provides resources to ensure students can access a well-rounded education, and those funds also allow schools to offer mental health support, drug and violence

prevention, mentoring, crisis intervention, and afterschool programming, as well as high-quality training for school personnel on trauma-informed practices. Further, we urge you to provide increased funding for the Department of Education's School Emergency Response to Violence program (Project SERV), which provides funding to school districts and institutions of higher education to help recover from violent or traumatic events in the community. Additional resources for these programs can revitalize communities and help to reduce violence.

Public Health

Combatting Chicago's community violence is not just an economic or education issue—it is also a serious public health matter. Gun violence is responsible for approximately 25 percent of the life expectancy gap between Black and White Chicagoans, and nearly half of Chicago residents witness violence by the age of 40. One of the best ways to break the cycle of violence is by supporting strong families, building environments that promote health, and starting early to prevent and mitigate the effects of experiencing trauma.

To address these social determinants of health, we urge you to provide in your budget tools and training for communities to promote health through the Administration for Children & Families, including robust funding for Community and Social Services Block Grants. Harmful childhood environments can shape lifelong health and behavioral outcomes, which is why we also urge you to invest in maternal and child health promotion programs at the Health Resources and Services Administration, including requesting strong funding for the Maternal & Child Health Block Grant and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program. We also urge you to increase support for prevention and treatment programs at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, including the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Project AWARE, Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, and the Interagency Task Force on Trauma-Informed Care.

In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention brings unique expertise to this issue, through its focus at its Injury Center on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Youth and Community Violence, and Firearm Injury Prevention Research. By employing a public health approach to this challenge, we can better identify trends and target resources at the most effective interventions.

Community Policing

Finally, we cannot reduce violence in Chicago without an effective community policing strategy in which law enforcement officers are properly trained and resourced and which creates a relationship of trust and cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. The federal government can help in Chicago by enhancing funding for programs that improve community policing, such as the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) and Byrne-JAG programs. As outlined above, the federal government also should increase funding

for community violence intervention programs and school-based mental health and trauma-informed care that can help disrupt and break the cycle of violence in the city of Chicago.

In your first year in office, you worked with Congress to provide more than \$100 million in public safety funding for Chicago and other communities through the *American Rescue Plan Act* and the appropriations process. We urge you to include similar funding in your new budget so we can build on the progress we have made since 2021.

The President's annual Budget Request is an important reflection of the Administration's priorities and the direction in which the President hopes to take the country. Gun violence has cut short far too many American lives and scarred communities across the United States. It is time that changes.

We urge you to use the President's FY 2025 Budget Request to continue to address this urgent problem by increasing investment in federal programs that will help stop the violence, lift people out of poverty, and save lives. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator