



Why We Cannot Wait: The Systematic Endangerment and Threatened Annihilation of Chicago's Minority Populations

A Report on Gun Violence

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1st District

Overview

This report assesses the extent and impact of Gun Violence in Chicago and Cook County from 2011 through the present.

In our post-9/11 world, the city of Chicago, Cook County and the federal government have rightly focused on protecting American citizens from acts of terrorism initiated outside of America.

However, this report starts with the premise that external threats to the American homeland are not a justification for overlooking grave threats to the safety and security of American citizens that originate on our city streets. And despite a clear obligation of all levels of government to do whatever is necessary to protect American lives, concerns about foreign terrorism over the course of the past two decades have obscured the rising threat of Domestic Terrorism in poor urban neighborhoods of color.

Nowhere is this threat more severe, and nowhere are the consequences graver than in Chicago.

Applicability of the Federal Domestic Terrorism Statute

“Domestic Terrorism” is defined in 18 U.S.C. Section 2331 as an act that is dangerous to human life, undertaken within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States, that violates the criminal laws of the United States or any state and that appears to be intended to do one of the following:

1. Intimidate or coerce a civilian population;
2. Influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or,
3. Affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping.

It is well known that the gun violence that has terrorized entire populations in certain Chicago neighborhoods has been initiated by certain street gangs engaged in the sale of narcotics and seeking control of certain territories in the City for purposes of furthering their illegal business interests.

This is the very definition of a sustained deadly, criminal effort to “intimidate or coerce a civilian population.”

In short, the gun violence that has gripped certain Chicago neighborhoods and taken more than 400 lives and wounded more than 2,578 people in Chicago (2,578 being the total wounded in Chicago in all of 2014) is Domestic Terrorism, pure and simple. To combat this domestic terrorism, a sustained, coordinated strategy is necessary, involving federal, state and local officials.

Unfortunately, to date, there has been very little coordination of resources, manpower and strategy to root out gun violence. We have the power and the ability to reduce gun violence in Chicago. Do we have the will?

The Obligation of Elected Officials

The number one responsibility of all elected officials is to provide for the safety of the citizens we represent. The preamble of the Illinois Constitution requires elected officials to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the people. Likewise, the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution require elected officials to provide for the safety and welfare of the people.

In addition to the obligations they place on leaders and stewards of public policy, these founding documents also suggest that every citizen of the United States has certain fundamental rights- the right to life, to liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

These fundamental rights should not depend on the zip code in which you happen to reside. Unfortunately, in too many neighborhoods in Chicago citizens are being deprived of these rights due to the persistent and pervasive flow of guns and drugs.

In essence, street gangs have taken over certain communities and they control those communities by terrorist tactics and intimidation. Elected officials cannot and should not expect communities that have been terrorized over a period of time to police themselves.

Terrorized residents will, with good reason, hesitate to tell law enforcement which individuals are perpetrating neighborhood shootings. Therefore, a coordinated strategy that includes the investment and involvement of the federal government is critical. Among other resources, the federal government can provide for the protection and potential relocation of witnesses.

This additional level of protection is warranted and necessary in order to establish basic security and quality of life for the residents of terrorized neighborhoods. Elected officials would be well advised to remember that these terrorized residents are the very people who elected us and on whose behalf we are sworn to advocate.

In the District that I represent as Cook County Commissioner, too many residents have been killed by gun violence, particularly in the Chicago neighborhoods of Austin, East Garfield and West Garfield. These murdered men, women and children were my constituents.

And the traumatized men, women and children who witnessed these murders and whose quality of life has been decimated by the constant threat of gun violence, are the people for whom I go to work every day. Therefore, it is incumbent upon me and my fellow elected officials to do everything within our power to secure and protect the lives and security of these endangered individuals. All resources must be mobilized in order to do this.

If we do not live up to our obligation to protect these populations, it is no exaggeration to say that the alternative is to risk the annihilation of entire neighborhoods, communities and populations in Chicagoland.

War Zones

It is difficult to argue with the fact that certain communities in Chicago have turned into war zones as the result of rampant gun violence.

The residents in these communities are as traumatized as the citizens of Syria or Iraq. They are afraid to let their children play in the streets. Urban warfare claims not just the lives of the armed warriors, but also, increasingly, innocent bystanders. In 2015 the category of individuals shot included babies being loaded into car seats, grandmothers sitting on their porches, and grade-schoolers watching 4th of July fireworks.

Most recently, a nine year old boy walking to his grandmother's house in the Auburn-Gresham neighborhood of Chicago was lured into an alley and executed by gun shots to the head and the back. Police investigators believe that the murder was intended as a message to the boy's father.

All gun violence is horrific, but the shooting of innocent bystanders, including children, has repercussions that extend beyond the individuals struck by the bullets. Witnesses, neighbors, or those who simply live in close proximity to these atrocities experience traumatic stress disorder.

Accounts of soldiers returning from war suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder are well-documented. A key distinction between a veteran of war dealing with trauma and a resident of a violence-torn neighborhood of Chicago dealing with trauma, is that the war veteran is grappling with an experience that occurred in the past.

By contrast, a resident of one of the more violent neighborhoods in Chicago, continues to deal with trauma that is ongoing. Because the violence in these neighborhoods continues unabated, a more accurate description of the condition besetting a resident of a violence-plagued Chicago neighborhood is "present traumatic stress disorder."

In August of 2015, 336 people were shot in Chicago. In September of 2015, 60 people were killed by gun violence.

In the 1st District, which I represent on the Cook County Board of Commissioners includes the neighborhood West Garfield Park. West Garfield Park has a population of 18,000. Last year, 21 murders occurred in West Garfield Park. These numbers are akin to a homicide rate of 116 per 100,000 people.

The country that leads the world in murders, Honduras, has a homicide rate of 90 people per 100,000 people.

The Chicago neighborhood of West Englewood has the second highest murder rate in the City- 73.3 murders per 100,000 people. This easily outpaces the country with the second highest murder rate in the world, Venezuela, which has a homicide rate of 53.7 people per 100,000.

Meanwhile, the United States of America as a whole has a homicide rate of 4.5 people per 100,000.

Citizens living in West Garfield and Englewood are living in virtual war zones. In one particularly horrifying incident, Shamiya Adams a 11 year old was killed by a bullet to the head as she sat in a friend's bedroom making s'mores. West Garfield Park also has a per capita income of \$10,951, and a 25.2 percent unemployment rate. We have an obligation to ensure the safety of all citizens in Cook County.

According to a published report in the Huffington Post on August 16, 2012, while some 2,000 U.S. Troops have been killed in Afghanistan since 2001, more than 5,000 people have been killed by gun fire in Chicago during that time--based on Dept. Of Defense and FBI data. Additionally, since 2011, in Chicago more than 10,000 people have been shot.

Oath to Serve

On December 1, 2014 I raised my right hand and made a promise to ensure the safety of the people I represent. My colleagues took the same oath. Too many of us have become conditioned to accept this level of violence. I believe that we can and must reduce the number of people being shot and killed in Chicago. We must make our streets safe so that children can walk to school without fear of being shot. Our senior citizens and other residents should not live in fear of being shot or robbed. How can students focus on education if they fear being shot? In 2012, 319 students in Chicago Public Schools were shot, and 24 of them were killed. An oath to serve means more than just tough talk about ending gun violence. We must implement solutions that will reduce gun violence and make all of our communities safe. This is not just an African American or Latino problem--this is a city of Chicago and Cook County problem.

Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 the federal government has invested billions to protect Americans from terrorist abroad. The attacks of September 11, 2001 claimed the lives of 2,996 people and caused at least \$10 billion in property and infrastructure damage and \$3 trillion in total costs. Since 2011, in Chicago more than 10,000 people have been shot. In 2015, someone in Chicago has been shot every 2.84 hours since January 1st. The federal government has rightly focused on external threats to America. However, I fear that if we do not focus on gun violence and its destabilizing impact on families and communities it could destroy our way of life. America will never be defeated by an external or existential threat. If America is to be defeated it will collapse from within. The persistent gun violence in Chicago is a clear and present threat to our national security.

Costs of Gun Violence

The real costs of gun violence are hard to quantify. There are real direct costs and indirect costs.

With gun shootings up 25 percent this year and increasing over the last three years the costs of this violence is staggering in terms of life, lost productivity and trauma. This is a true public health crisis. It must be met with the same sense of urgency that we utilized to fight the Ebola crisis or the 9-11 attacks. The costs associated with gun violence and narcoterrorism are unsustainable. The burden and drain on the Cook County Health and Hospital System is overwhelming. An average gunshot victim seen in the emergency room costs \$55,000 to stabilize. The costs soar when a person is shot in the back and has a spinal cord injury. The costs of care rise to millions of dollars. The police investigation, ambulance services, court costs and jail confinement

are unsustainable. Advances in medical technology have certainly saved lives and reduced what would have been an even more intolerable body count in 2015. But paradoxically, those advances have also increased the cost of ongoing treatment.

Sustained gun violence also drives property values down and those who can afford to move leave Chicago. Many citizens on fixed incomes are trapped and have no options except to live with increased gun violence.

The impact of economic development is felt greatest in communities where jobs have disappeared and there is high violence. The community of North Lawndale is a vivid example of economic and social dislocation. Since the 1960's nearly half of its housing stock disappeared. This community lost thousands of jobs; two large factories anchored the economy of Lawndale in its glory days. The Hawthorne plant of Western Electric employed 43,000 workers and an International Harvester plant employed 14,000 workers. The world headquarters for Sears Roebuck and company was located there and provided another 10,000 jobs. The departure of these companies in the 1970's and 80's triggered the demise or exodus of smaller stores, banks, and other businesses that relied on the wages paid by large employers. Those jobs have not been replaced and unemployment in Lawndale is over 30 percent. The per capita income in North Lawndale is \$12,548 and in South Lawndale it is \$10,697. The lack of manufacturing jobs has led to despair and hopelessness. This has fueled the illegal economy of narcoterrorism. The lack of real investment and a coordinated focus on communities like Lawndale have contributed to these war zones. It is clear that public safety paves the way for economic development. The city of Chicago and Cook County are only as strong as our weakest neighborhoods.

Solutions

The problem of gun violence did not begin overnight. This crisis has plagued Chicago for a long period of time. The recent reporting by the media has put the spotlight on this issue. The costs to the city of Chicago and Cook County require us to reimagine a Chicago where fewer people are shot and killed. It requires a coordinated and sustained strategy toward reducing gun violence. This is a strategy that must involve the federal, state and local governments.

A Gun Violence Coordinator is a new idea. It has not been tried before. It does not add an additional layer of bureaucracy. When you are at war--we never send our troops in without a General and a strategy. We are war with gangs fueled by drugs from Mexican Cartels. The people dying from this war are overwhelmingly African American. The Cook County Medical Examiner data shows that since 2012--80 percent of the gunshot wound deaths have been African Americans.

On October 28, 2015, the Cook County Board of Commissioners enacted my ordinance establishing the position of Gun Violence Coordinator. The Cook County Sheriff will appoint the Gun Violence Coordinator before year's end.

The Gun Violence Coordinator will work in conjunction with a gun violence task force comprised of federal, state, and local law enforcement officials to devise a strategy to combat gun violence in Cook County. The Gun Violence Coordinator will also make recommendations for deployment of resources and manpower to the Sheriff of Cook County. The Gun Violence Coordinator and task force will recommend policy initiatives to the City Council of Chicago and Cook County Board to aid in reducing gun violence. The Gun Violence Coordinator's sole responsibility 24-7 will be to focus on gun violence in Cook County and work with the task force to devise strategies that will reduce gun violence.

I have put forward a Seven Point Plan to curb gun violence that I hope the Gun Violence Coordinator and his/her task force will consider. We cannot wait to solve this problem. The costs will overwhelm our budgets and our city and County will be vulnerable.

Finally, we need to consider strategic taxation and revenue that both discourages activity dangerous to public safety and creates revenue streams that can be used to increase public safety. To that end, I have introduced an ammunition tax as part of Cook County's 2016 Budget, the proceeds of which will be dedicated to additional resources to combat gun violence in Cook County.

As a County and as a people, we must not relent in our efforts to reduce the gun violence that has endangered whole segments of our population. While the above initiatives are not guaranteed to be successful, they are supported by sound data and strategy. Most importantly, they provide hope that we can get our arms around this problem before it is too late.

It has been said that a person can live about 40 days without food, three days without water, eight minutes without air, but only one second without hope.