



**Pennsylvania Senate Democratic Policy Committee
Public Hearing on Secondary Costs of Gun Violence
Wednesday, August 24, 2022**

**Testimony of Samantha Koch, Executive Policy Manager
Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency**

On behalf of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), the Commonwealth's justice planning and policymaking agency, I am writing to express our support for the Committee's examination into the toll of gun violence in our state.

Created by Act 274 of 1978, PCCD is an administrative commission of the Governor's Executive Offices. Our mission is to enhance the quality, coordination, and planning within the criminal and juvenile justice systems; to facilitate the delivery of services to victims of crime; and to increase the safety of our communities. Among our agency's core functions, we are responsible for the administration of millions in federal and state dollars in grants to state and local justice agencies, victim service providers and children's advocacy centers, non-profit organizations, and school entities. The agency is also responsible for administering the state's victim's compensation program, as well as for the training and certification of sheriffs, deputy sheriffs, and constables.

In August 2019, Governor Tom Wolf signed an [executive order](#) tasking state agencies under his jurisdiction – including PCCD – with taking steps to address gun violence as both a public health and public safety crisis. The executive order also established an 18-member Special Council on Gun Violence, housed within PCCD, which was responsible for examining the impacts of gun violence and making recommendations to chart Pennsylvania on a different course.

Early on in the Special Council's deliberations, the group recognized that while the immeasurable human costs should undoubtedly be the primary concern in any discussion about gun violence, there are measurable costs to consider as well. These include direct costs borne by people who survive gunshot wounds, such as medical care, loss of income, and – in the most serious of cases – long-term care resulting from injuries like paralysis.

Among its [recommendations](#), the Special Council identified a need to enhance the quality and availability of data related to firearm-related injuries, including investing in research and data collection to better understand the economic costs associated with gun violence. To that end, PCCD's Office of Research, Evaluation, and Strategic Policy Development (ORESPO) has worked to obtain and analyze available public health and public safety datasets related to gun violence. This includes requesting and receiving data from the Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council (PHC4) on treatment of nonfatal firearm-related injuries. Using this comprehensive dataset, researchers from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) were able to glean a number of important findings related to the scope, prevalence, and costs of nonfatal shootings over a five-year period (2016-2021):

- **Initial injury totals and costs:** An estimated 10,640 individuals were treated for new, non-fatal firearm injuries in Pennsylvania's hospitals, resulting in \$308.4 million in medical costs (\$51 million per year). The average cost of treatment for a patient with firearm-related injuries was \$34,837 in 2020.

- **Rising medical costs and injuries:** Gun violence costs and injuries are rising in Pennsylvania, and sharply increased in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting shutdowns. Between 2016 and 2020, the number of total injuries increased by 20 percent and medical costs increased by 107 percent; this includes a 46 percent increase in accidental firearm-related injuries and a five percent increase in the number of assault-related injuries.
- **Economic and Racial Disparities:** Gun violence disproportionately impacts low-income people and people of color in Pennsylvania. The poorest one-fifth of zip codes in Pennsylvania incurred nearly 60 percent of firearm-related medical costs. In addition, although Black people make up just 11 percent of Pennsylvania’s population, two-thirds of all patients treated for firearm injuries were Black.
- **Long-term costs:** 16 percent of people treated for firearm-related injuries required additional hospital visits, taking on significantly more in medical expenses (average of \$70,000 per patient). In addition, more than three percent of firearm-related injuries result in paralysis, which carries significant long-term costs for both the individual and society.
- **Costs to publicly funded systems:** Analysis of insurers billed for treatment of gun injuries suggests that taxpayer-funded systems like Medicaid and Medicare bear the brunt of short- and long-term care expenses. Over five years, 65 percent of inpatient/outpatient visits were submitted to Medicaid and five percent to Medicare, compared to 20 percent of injuries submitted primarily to private insurance. An additional 7.5 percent of Pennsylvanians injured by firearms were uninsured.

Taking into account the broader economic impact these injuries have—including medical costs, lost work, and lower quality of life—the total costs of gun violence in Pennsylvania amounts to a staggering \$1.5 billion over five years (\$300 million per year). As significant as these sums are, they likely underestimate the full scope of costs to taxpayers, including disability and unemployment payments. Notably, they also do not capture costs associated with gun homicides and other firearm-related fatalities.

These findings reiterate the need for effective prevention strategies and efforts to address the significant trauma gun violence imposes on individuals and communities. In recent years, PCCD has utilized state and federal funds to support these kinds of programs through its Community Violence Prevention/Reduction, Gun Violence Reduction, and Violence Intervention and Prevention (VIP) grants programs. These efforts will be further enhanced through the unprecedented investments in violence reduction initiatives made in the FY 2022-23 state budget, which appropriated \$105 million in VIP grants, \$50 million in Gun Violence Prosecution and Investigation grants, and \$135 million in grants for Local Law Enforcement Initiatives, among other programs.

We look forward to publishing a full report of data and findings on non-fatal firearm injuries in the coming weeks on PCCD’s [Gun Violence Data & Research webpage](#). If you have any questions or would like additional information in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact our agency.