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Gun violence is a devastating part of life in many of Chicago's most high-risk communities. Despite its disturbing impact, a persistent level of carnage barely registers across the city at large. When case numbers transiently spike—or victims are high-profile or portrayed as sympathetic—the response is often a renewed call to action. Despite noble intentions, the status quo remains, as root causes are complex and solutions largely fail to address this complexity.

I joined the CGVRC with prior academic interest in gun violence trends. I've authored works on epidemiology of gun violence in the U.S., including the impact of the now-long-expired federal assault weapons ban. While this research was—and remains—vital, the CGVRC has brought me new perspective, particularly as it relates to the key importance of community engagement and citywide investment.

Community engagement emphasizes dialogue, mutual respect, and reflection to build trust. This includes, for example, outreach work done by former gang members Harold Martinez and DeCarlos Toro, as featured in a May 2019 Chicago Tribune report. Such outreach is critical to combating a problem whose solution requires community participation. There is understandable suspicion from within many of Chicago's most vulnerable communities who feel that real grassroots change cannot come from the outside; past efforts of academics, police, and well-intentioned “outsiders” have been viewed with wariness. Gangs take advantage of this sense of community to recruit. They offer both belonging as well as financial incentives, posing real challenges to fight the allure. Effective community engagement and citywide participation is crucial to overcoming these barriers.

For community engagement to be impactful, however, it needs to be appropriately funded. Massive underfunding leads to asymmetrical warfare, where community organizers are outpaced and outspent by gangs, who have a vested interest in inhibiting progress. One reason for the underfunding is a failure to convince the public that Chicago's gun violence affects *all* neighborhoods and taxpayers—not just not just morally, but financially.

Crain's Chicago Business published an article in August 2019 on the cost of gun violence in Chicago. They cite Boston Consulting Group research estimating the direct costs in 2018 totaled \$3 billion (i.e., \$1.6 million per homicide and \$1.1 million per non-fatal shooting). Mother Jones, in a 2015 expose, placed direct costs—the sum of police investigations, hospital

and mental health costs, prosecutions and confinements—at \$441,000, or \$770 annually per taxpayer. These figures, *Crain's* highlights, exclude indirect costs, such as the resulting financial impact of population loss, the exodus of businesses from high-crime areas (and the consequences on revenue for shops, museums, etc. that remain), the effect on tourism as well as Chicago's overall reputation. Thus, the city's ubiquitous gun violence not only impacts communities like Austin and Englewood, but it continues to inflict sustained and lasting damage to all of its citizens. Convincing the public of this reality is critical towards achieving levels of funding required to solve this problem.

The CGVRC allowed me to compliment my previous academic study of gun violence with new perspectives rooted in community advocacy. It also provided for thought-provoking discussions with a diverse cohort and faculty, enabling each of us to consider fresh ways to engage using our individual experiences and talents. I'm very grateful for this opportunity.