Washington, DC, the Nation’s Capital, is home to more than 650,000 residents. Headquarters of the Federal government, a large portion of DC boasts regal structures and palatial buildings that are home to agencies, monuments, museums, and more. There are also 19 colleges and universities in this compact city, nearly all in the Northwest section of town.

But despite the city’s assets and grandeur, in recent history DC also earned the dubious distinction of being dubbed the “Murder Capital” of the United States during a period when homicides soared. The “other” DC is plagued by concentrated poverty, substandard education, easy access to drugs and guns, and high rates of violence. The District experienced five straight years with more than 400 homicides between 1989 – 1993, with a staggering 482 murders in 1991. More recently, massive development and investment in the District has contributed to a steep reduction in violence. The six years between 2009 – 2014 saw the lowest rates of homicides in many decades, reaching an all-time low of 88 murders in 2012\(^1\). But since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, homicides and shootings have once again spiked, rising to 226 murders in the District in 2021.

When someone is shot in the District, there is an immediate, multifaceted, and very expensive response from an array of government agencies. The Fire Department dispatches EMTs, government contracted ambulances respond, several Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) units descend on the scene, investigators from the United States Attorney’s Office sometimes arrive, staff and contractors of the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE) show up, and, if the victims are declared dead on the scene, the coroner is called. And all of this is only at the site of the shooting itself. Then there is a hospitalization often paid for by tax dollars and in the case of serious injury, a rehabilitation plan. Government also expends resources on victim compensation. There are also the investigative costs borne by law enforcement, the cost of the legal process itself, and the steep fees associated with incarceration. The MPD homicides clearance rate of nearly 70% in 2020, mean most cases go to trial and often lead to long incarceration periods. When there are multiple victims and/or multiple suspects, these efforts multiply for a single shooting incident.

And these are just a few of the direct costs of each injury shooting in the District; there’s also long-term emotional costs to families, lost wages, lost revenue to DC, and the unknowns that accompany lives cut short.

In order to closely estimate the government price tag for shootings and homicides, Peace for DC commissioned the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) to conduct this Cost of Gun Violence study. NICJR quantified the direct costs of shootings and deliberately used the low end of the range for each expense. Of note, NICJR did not attempt to quantify the loss of production costs when the victim(s) or suspect(s) were working at the time of the incident. Nationally, those costs have been estimated at an additional $1-2 million for each shooting incident. Therefore, the calculated per homicide shooting cost of $1.5 million in the District is a safe estimate, the real cost is likely even higher.

Each shooting homicide in Washington, DC costs taxpayers $1.5 million

In 2020 alone, there were 198 homicides and another 522 non-fatal shooting incidents involving 753 victims. These incidents cost DC taxpayers an astonishing $892 million. If the District could reduce its gun violence rate by just 20%, government savings could reach as much as $178 million every year.

\(^1\) District Crime Data at a Glance | mpdc
If Washington, DC could reduce its gun violence rate by just 20%, that could result in a combined government savings of $178 million every year.

In the past few years, the District has made significant investments in gun violence reduction strategies. In partnership with the Public Welfare Foundation, NICJR conducted a Landscape Analysis that chronicles many of these investments but also highlights the need for greater coordination.

In partnership with the District’s Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, NICJR produced a detailed Gun Violence Problem Analysis that concludes that there is a small, identifiable group of young adults at very high risk who are responsible for the vast majority of gun violence in the District. Focusing intensive, well-coordinated intervention efforts with these individuals can lead to major reductions in gun violence.

Mayor Muriel Bowser’s Administration has increased funding for programs and services through the ONSE and the newly created Office of Gun Violence Prevention. The Administration has also allocated many millions of dollars from the American Rescue Plan toward violence reduction efforts. Those funds expire in three to four years and the District will have to find permanent funding for those much needed resources.

When focused on the right people and places and well-coordinated, the return on these investments is most importantly the saving of lives, but also reduced costs and burden to taxpayers.
**The Cost Per Shooting**

The true governmental cost of gun violence to the city, County and State.

**Homicide Cost**

- **Crime Scene**: $6,994
- **Hospital**: $88,525
- **Incarceration**: $1,071,847
- **Victim Support**: $69,368
- **Lost Revenue**: $87,760

**Total Cost**: $1.53M

**Per Homicide Shooting**

- Per one suspect: $3.1M
- Per one family: $1.6M

**Injury Shooting Cost**

- **Crime Scene**: $5,962
- **Hospital**: $144,617
- **Incarceration**: $543,214
- **Victim Support**: $44,876
- **Lost Revenue**: $24,134

**Total Cost**: $783K

**Per Injury Shooting**

- Per one suspect: $1.6M
- Per one family: $313,264

**Note**: Total cost based on two suspects.

**Washington, District of Columbia**

**National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform**
Subject: Pre-Trial Incarceration

Source: • District of Columbia Department of Corrections Fact Sheet

Notes: District of Columbia Department of Corrections FY21 Budget $177.8 million FY21 Average Daily Population = 1,544
Average Daily Cost Per Inmate DC DOC: $315/day Average 2 year period of pre-trial incarceration in average of 10 years in federal prison, subtracting average of 20 hours is spent on attempted murder cases and 400 hours for homicides cases. 2021 Firearm Injuries: Health Care Service Needs and Costs (Link)

Subject: State Prison (Attempted Murder)

Source: • DC Bureau of Prisons

Notes: Federal Bureau of Prisons FY20 annual cost to house an adult is $39,158
Average Daily Cost Per Inmate BOP: $107/day Convictions involving injury shootings serve an average of 10 years in federal prison, subtracting pretrial ‘time-served’ in the DC Department of Corrections. ($39,158 x 10 years) - 2 years = $313,264

Subject: State Prison (Murder Case)

Source: • United States Sentencing Commission Guidelines

Notes: Federal Bureau of Prisons FY20 annual cost to house an adult is $39,158 Average inmate serves 23.5 years for murder under USSC sentencing guidelines, minus time served pre-adjudication. ($39,158 x 23.5 years) - 2 years = $841,897

Subject: Victim of Crimes

Source: • DC Court’s Crime Victim Compensation Program

Notes: Homicide Victim: $10,000 for burial expenses $10,000 for victim lost wages for 1 year $9,000 for family grief counseling Total = $29,000

Subject: Social Service Assistance

Source: • DC Department of Human Services SNAP eligibility award = $658 for family of 3 • DC TANF award = $665 for family of 3

Notes: When a victim is shot, many can’t return to work immediately. Since the victim and perpetrator may be a major financial contributor to the household, many families may need to apply for social services support. The estimate for this study is for 1 year of Social Service assistance. ($1,323/mo x 12 months) x 2 families = $31,752

Subject: Medical Examiner’s Office

Source: • DC Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) • DC OCME Budget

Notes: District of Columbia FY 20 Coroner’s Budget was $14.1 million. The District of Columbia Office of Chief Medical Examiner conducted 1,639 fullpartial autopsies in FY20. The cost per autopsy $84,816

Subject: Lost Tax Revenue (One person going to jail)

Source: • District of Columbia Office of Tax and Revenue

Notes: District income tax for a person earning $30K/year = $1,600 ($400 plus 6% of the excess over $10K ($20K)) General Sales & Use tax rate = 6%. Sales & use tax varies for beverages, restaurants meals, tickets, and other items. If person spends 1/3 of income, then total sales tax = $594. Total combined tax = $2,194yr If person has to serve a 10 years sentence for attempted murder, then ($2,194 x 10 years) = $21,940 of missed combined tax revenue. If shooting victim doesn’t work for one year, then an additional $2,194 of lost revenue is added. Total Lost Sales Tax Revenue = $24,134

Subject: Lost Tax Revenue (Murder: Loss Revenue for 2 people)

Source: • District of Columbia Office of Tax and Revenue

Notes: District income tax for a person earning $30K/year = $1,600 ($400 plus 6% of the excess over $10K ($20K)) If person earns 30K/year, then total income tax = $1,600. If person spends 1/3 of income, then total sales tax = $594. Total combined tax = $2,194yr Average murder sentence is 20 years; combined revenue loss for victim and perpetrator is at least $87,760 ($2,194 x 20 years x 2 people)

Subject: Police Investigation

Source: • Comparative interviews with police departments across the nation. • Metropolitan PD Salary Schedule

Notes: Investigations typically can extend over a two year period. An average of 20 hours is spent on attempted murder cases and 400 hours for homicides cases.

Subject: DA & Public Defender

Source: • Estimates of Time Spent in Capital and Non-Capital Murder Cases • US Courts Staff Attorney • Public Defender Service

Notes: 1087 hours to defend & prosecute a murder case x $111 (DA $61/hr + PD $50/hr) = $120,657

Subject: Court Process

Source: • DC Superior Court Personnel System Pay Rates (Link)

Notes: Combined hourly rates of the following staff: Judge, Bailiff, Research Attorney, Court Reporter, Clerk = $360 per hour. $360 x 44 hours (murder case) = $15,840

Subject: Fire/EMS Transport

Source: • DC Fire and EMS Department

Notes: Phone interviews with crime scene cleanup staff and owners. Average cost among competitive vendors in the District of Columbia to clean up crime scenes involving blood and other biological fluids = $2,500

Subject: Scene Clean Up

Source: • Aftermath • BioOne

Notes: If person has to serve a 10 years sentence for attempted murder, then ($2,194 x 10 years) = $21,940 of missed combined tax revenue. If shooting victim doesn’t work for one year, then an additional $2,194 of lost revenue is added. Total Lost Sales Tax Revenue = $24,134

Subject: ER/ Surgery for Gun-Shot Victim

Source: • 2020 National Trends and Cost Burden of Surgically Treated Gunshot Wounds in the US • 2021 Firearm Injuries: Health Care Service Needs and Costs (Link)

Notes: Average cost of gun-shot victims treated and released the same day = $1,478 (ER base cost) Average cost of gun-shot victims requiring surgery and hospital stay = $87,097 (surgery cost) + $56,092 (hospital stay & rehabilitation center) Average cost of gun-shot victims requiring surgery and hospital stay = $87,097 (surgery cost) + $56,092 (hospital stay & rehabilitation center) Formula for this study: (Base cost + surgery cost - 1/5 (20%) of surgery cost) = $70,860 per shooting victim requiring surgery and rehabilitation.

Subject: Victim Support

Source: • DC TANF award = $665 for family of 3 • DC Department of Human Services SNAP eligibility award = $658 for family of 3 • DC TANF award = $665 for family of 3

Notes: When a victim is shot, many can’t return to work immediately. Since the victim and perpetrator may be a major financial contributor to the household, many families may need to apply for social services support. The estimate for this study is for 1 year of Social Service assistance. ($1,323/mo x 12 months) x 2 families = $31,752

Subject: BioOne

Source: • BioOne

Notes: When a victim is shot, many can’t return to work immediately. Since the victim and perpetrator may be a major financial contributor to the household, many families may need to apply for social services support. The estimate for this study is for 1 year of Social Service assistance. ($1,323/mo x 12 months) x 2 families = $31,752