

Columbus, Ohio

THE COST

of Gun Violence

THE DIRECT COST TO TAXPAYERS

The City of Columbus, Ohio, is home to 907,901 residents, of which 54.9% are White, 29.1% are Black, 6.7% are Latino, and 5.8% are Asian.¹ In the early 21st century, Columbus saw rapid growth in sectors such as education, healthcare, transportation, and professional services. The city also became a hub for high-tech industries and manufacturing, producing automobiles, motorcycles, communications equipment, and steel products. Additionally, Columbus is home to Ohio State University, one of the largest public universities in the US.

Like many other cities across the nation, Columbus experienced a spike in gun violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, the city saw 93 fatal shootings and 158 nonfatal shooting incidents. In 2020, Columbus experienced a nearly 56% increase in fatal shootings, with 145 fatal shootings, and a 132% increase in nonfatal shootings, with 366 nonfatal shooting incidents.² Since 2021, the city has averaged 152 fatal shooting incidents and 435 nonfatal shooting incidents annually.³

When someone is shot in Columbus, there is an immediate, multifaceted, and very expensive response from an array of government agencies. The Fire Department dispatches Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), government-contracted ambulances respond, and several CPD units descend on the scene.

Investigators from the Franklin County Prosecuting Attorney Office (FCPAO) also often arrive, and if the victim is declared dead on the scene, the Coroner is called. All of this is only for the shooting scene itself. For a surviving victim, there is also typically a hospitalization, which is frequently paid for by tax dollars. Rehabilitation follows in the case of serious injury, and victim compensation is generally provided. There is also often a lengthy investigation by CPD and FCPAO, who are sometimes joined by the US Attorney. With the CPD arrest rate at 63% in 2022, a trial and a long incarceration period frequently follow.⁴ When there are multiple victims and/or suspects, these costs multiply for a single shooting incident. These are just some of the costs of each shooting in Columbus.

The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) was commissioned by the Columbus Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) to conduct this detailed analysis that documents the government expenses accompanying every fatal or nonfatal shooting in Columbus. In tracking the direct costs per shooting incident, NICJR has deliberately used the low end of the range for each expense. For example, this study does not include the loss-of-production costs when the victim or suspect were working at the time of the incident. Nationally, those costs have been estimated at an additional \$1–2 million

for each shooting incident. This means that the calculated cost of \$2,126,931 for a fatal shooting in Columbus is a conservative estimate; the real cost is likely even higher.

In the past three years, Columbus has averaged approximately 152 fatal shootings and 435 nonfatal shootings annually. At this rate, each year of shootings will ultimately cost taxpayers more than \$500,125,017, with both immediate costs such as crime scene response and longer-term costs such as lost tax revenue and long-term incarceration. If Columbus could reduce its gun violence rate by just 20%, that could result in government savings of more than \$100,025,003 for every year of shootings.

In the past few years, Columbus has taken key steps to reduce gun violence. Most notably, the City established an OVP that coordinates local violence reduction efforts and serves as an intermediary for community-based organizations and government agencies. The City and the OVP have also invested in vital research, technical assistance, and training to support frontline organizations serving those at the greatest risk of gun violence. The ongoing efforts have shown positive results, as both homicides and nonfatal shootings have seen a significant decline.⁵ As the City understands, a relatively small investment in effective gun violence intervention strategies can yield significant reductions in shootings, save lives, and produce massive savings.

1. [US Census Bureau QuickFacts: Columbus city, Ohio](#)

2. Received via direct communication with Gun Violence Archive

3. *Ibid.*

4. [Columbus Division of Police 2022 Annual Report](#)

5. Throughout the report, "fatal shootings" and "homicides" are not used synonymously. "Fatal shootings" refers to shooting incidents resulting in the death of the victim; "homicides" refers to all homicides in general.

The Greater **COMMUNITY COST** of Gun Violence

There are significant community costs of gun violence beyond the direct costs included in NICJR's calculations. In addition to the direct financial burden borne by taxpayers, areas with high rates of gun violence experience the loss of community resources and decreases in property values. Businesses, community events, and other vital resources often flee from violent neighborhoods. Further, a study by the Controller for the City of Philadelphia examining the economic impact of gun violence on property values found that "a single homicide lowers sale prices by 2.3 percent in the immediate neighborhood (within 0.75 miles of the homicide)."⁶

Community members in neighborhoods where rates of violence are highest also bear the burden of community tension and trauma. The normalization, or even expectation of violence can lead to high rates of gun possession and the resolving of minor disputes with gun violence. The public health approach to violence shows that, like disease, violence is a contagion that can breed in areas of social dysfunction. The National Institutes of Health found that "Contagious diseases and violence tend to cluster in similar ways...

There are geographic 'hot spots' for contagious diseases, such as the 2015 measles outbreak linked to Disneyland in California involving clusters of unvaccinated children. Likewise, there are geographic hot spots for violent crime on specific streets and in specific neighborhoods."⁷

Finally, children are especially impacted by violence around them. Experiencing violence, witnessing violence, and having close friends or family members victimized by violence produces trauma and vicarious trauma. In the 1990s, the groundbreaking Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study by the Centers for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente revealed that children who have traumatic experiences when they are young have significantly higher rates of poor health outcomes as they age.^{8,9} Additional studies have proven that the experience of trauma negatively impacts the brain function of young people and can cause depression, behavioral challenges, academic disruption, and delinquency.

Columbus: Gun Violence Data

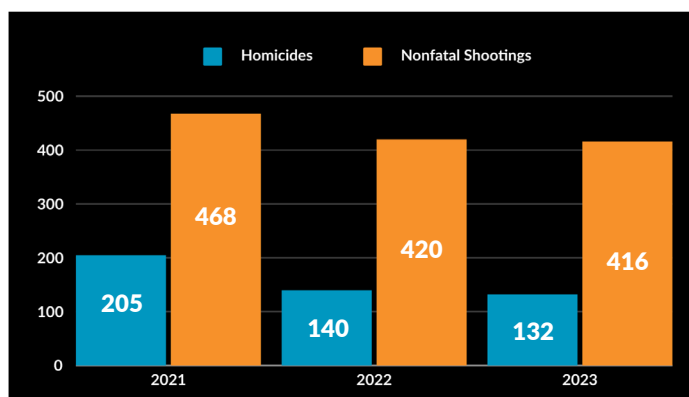
Population:

907,901



Police Force: 1,753

Homicides and Nonfatal Shootings (2021-2023)^{10,11}



Homicide Clearance Rates^{12,13}

2020	46.5%
2021	31.5%
2022	63%

6. [Report on the Economic Impact of Homicides](#)

7. [The Contagious Spread of Violence Among US Adolescents Through Social Networks](#)

8. [Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults](#)

9. While the CDC-Kaiser ACEs study is not available to the public, information about the study may be found [here](#).

10. [Columbus Division of Police 2022 Annual Report](#)


11. 2023 Homicides were obtained from Gun Violence Archive, as access to an official calendar year annual report was unavailable.

12. [Crime Data Explorer](#); Clearance rate is determined by the City's reported number of homicides reported and cleared within the year. This information is obtained from Crime Data Explorer, which uses data reported directly from the Police Department.

13. [Columbus Division of Police 2022 Annual Report](#)

COST BREAKDOWN

Columbus
Ohio




CRIME SCENE RESPONSE

The crime scene response to a fatal shooting or severe nonfatal shooting typically includes a heavy police presence, fire/EMT staff, and medical transport staff. Based on Columbus Police Department data, CPD could deploy up to 21 officers, including patrol, homicide unit personnel, and other supervisory-level officers, to respond to a typical fatal shooting.



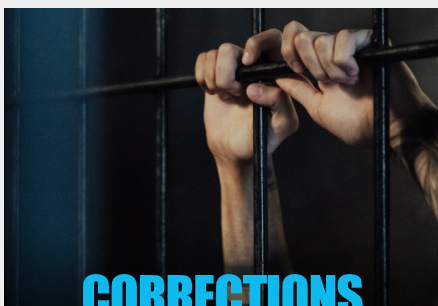
MEDICAL

Once a victim has been transported to the hospital, the costs of treatment in an emergency room (ER) trauma unit, surgery, inpatient stay, and rehabilitation are exorbitant. The average cost per incident can reach \$50,196 for fatal shootings and \$66,877 for nonfatal shootings. With a little more than 40% of gunshot victims either uninsured or on Medicaid, these costs represent a tremendous strain on the Columbus hospital network.



CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Justice system costs include police investigation, prosecution and defense attorneys, court personnel and judges, and the use of court facilities. Due to the consequences of a homicide conviction, these cases go to trial more often than other types of cases. Sometimes these cases involve multiple suspects with multiple court dates and separate trials. From the time of arrest, court proceedings in fatal or nonfatal shooting cases average about two years.




CORRECTIONS

Incarceration accounts for a large portion of the costs once a suspect is arrested. A stay in the Franklin County jail system costs an average of \$25,873 for a fatal shooting pretrial incarceration period and \$1,629 for a nonfatal shooting pretrial incarceration period. Following a trial, an incarcerated individual is incarcerated within the Ohio prison system at an average cost of \$244,119 for those convicted of attempted murder and \$569,028 for those convicted of homicide.



VICTIM SUPPORT & SOCIAL SERVICES

Many victim support costs are covered by Ohio's Victims of Crime Compensation. Surviving victims of nonfatal shootings and families of homicide victims receive, on average, \$4,107 in compensation to cover costs such as burial expenses, medical expenses, and counseling. Since the victim and suspect may be major financial contributors to their households, many families may need to apply for social services support after their family member is incarcerated, injured, or deceased. Including costs such as Social Security benefits and social services for the families of each victim and arrested suspect increases the total cost for victim support and social services to \$448,217 for a fatal shooting and \$223,292 for a nonfatal shooting.

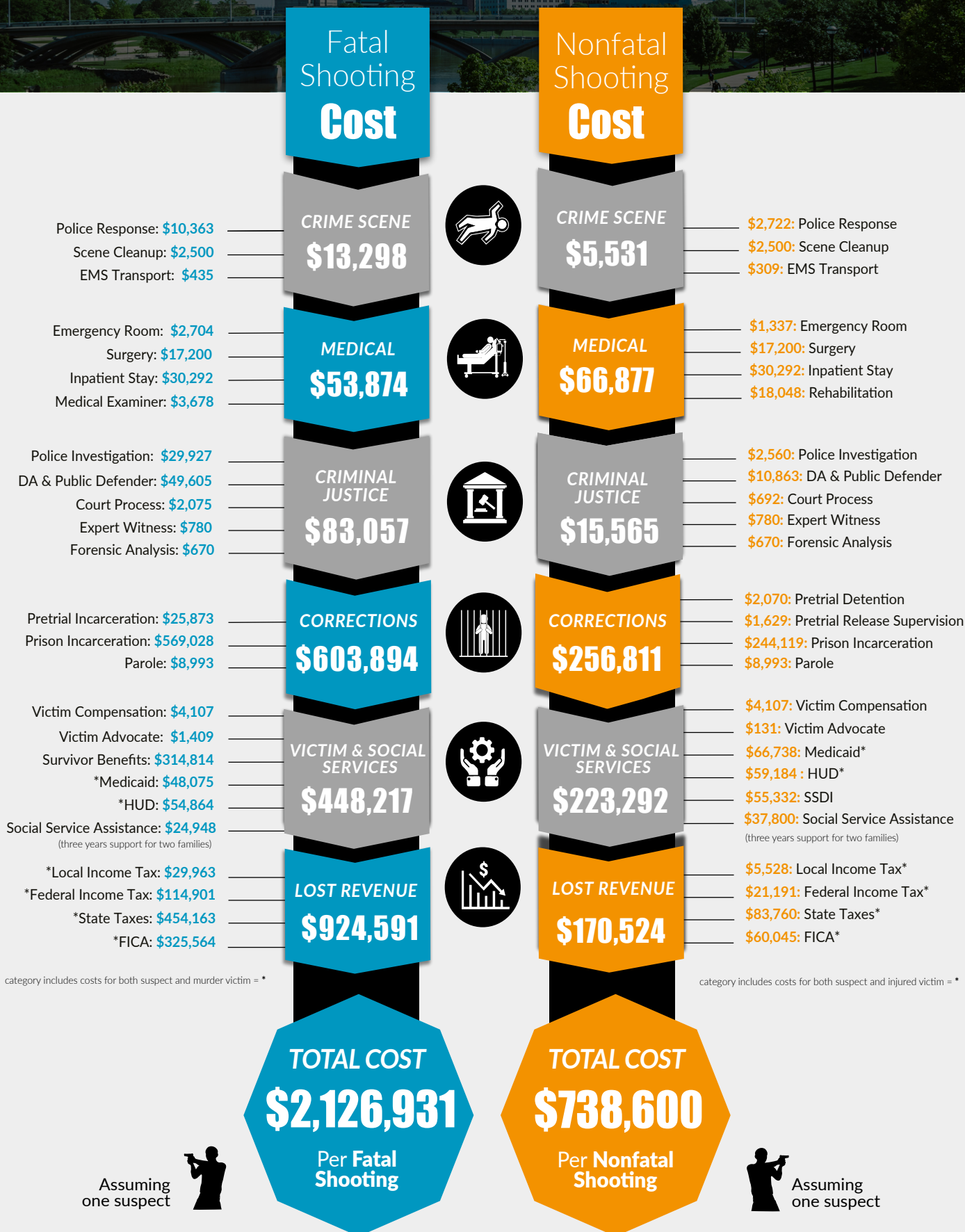


LOST TAX REVENUE

Ohio has a state income tax rate of 2.75% and a sales and use tax of 5.75%. When a fatal or nonfatal shooting occurs, neither income nor sales tax can be collected from the incarcerated individual(s) and fatal shooting victim(s). Each incident can represent lost tax revenue from two individuals for 10 to 25 years.

THE COST PER SHOOTING

The governmental cost of gun violence to the City, County, and State



Assuming one suspect



Assuming one suspect

Close Up

Following the Trajectory of One Shooting in Columbus



In February 2021, an altercation ended in gunfire, killing a 27-year-old Columbus man. The shooting occurred shortly after 1:00 am, and a 23-year old male suspect was arrested within 10 minutes of the officers' arrival on scene. The victim was rushed to the hospital but succumbed to his injuries around 3:00 am. It only took two hours for an argument to turn into a life lost, a man facing murder charges, and two grieving families.

After witnesses called 911, officers arrived within minutes. According to court documents, at least 12 patrol officers and two detectives arrived on scene. Officers spoke with the victim and witnesses and found the suspect nearby. For the ten minutes of confirmed initial crime scene response, the department would have spent \$56 for officer time. Only the documented 10-minute crime scene response is included here, but officers typically spend 11 hours on scene following a fatal shooting. Available court and police documents did not specify further investigative time or activities, but detectives typically spend 147 hours investigating a fatal shooting incident after the initial crime scene response, for an additional cost of \$7,497.

The victim in this case was transferred from the scene to Mount Carmel East Hospital via ambulance at a cost of \$430. He died at the hospital about two hours later. While it is unclear exactly what medical procedures and costs were incurred, according to national data, a gunshot victim who dies in the emergency department requires \$2,704 in medical care costs on average. After the victim's death, an autopsy was performed at an additional cost of \$3,678.

After the arrest, the suspect was booked into the Franklin County Jail, where he awaited trial for 490 days at a cost of \$13,720. During this time, the case proceeded through the prosecution process including court proceedings

and investigations. Forensic testing was completed, which costs \$670 on average, and the defense hired a private investigator, asking the court for \$1,200 to cover costs.

This process also included four continuance hearings and two motion hearings, each requiring the presence of a prosecutor, appointed defense attorney, judge, clerk, reporter, and bailiff, and lasting between one and a half and two and a half hours in court, for a cost of \$4,020. The appointed defense attorney reported an additional 181.2 hours outside of court working on the case. While the same information is not available for the prosecution, assuming the attorneys required roughly the same number of hours for out-of-court preparation, this amounted to an additional \$22,831.

Victim advocates and mitigation specialists working typical hours add another \$5,424 to provide support to a grieving family and advocate for an equitable sentence for the accused upon conviction. It is also common for judges and court clerks to spend time outside of court working on a case in Franklin County; this is a combined added cost of \$136 per hour, which is not included here.

In June 2022, the case went to trial. One day for jury selection and four days for trial amounted to \$11,558 in courtroom time for attorneys and court staff. Court reported fees amount to \$125, the jury per diem cost \$672, and service of subpoena fees to notify witnesses they were due in court amounted to another \$159. Recorded witness fees for testifying officers were at least \$30, in addition to the \$1,148 spent on courtroom time for professional witnesses (based on hourly salaries and average time logged waiting for or in court by witnesses).¹⁴

Ultimately, the suspect was convicted on all charges. In a 90-minute sentencing

hearing that cost \$503, he was sentenced to 30 years to life in state prison with eligibility for five years of parole in 20 years. His 15-day stay in county jail between trial and sentencing added an additional \$420 to his pretrial incarceration costs.

A 20-year stay in state prison in Ohio amounts to \$699,885, and a five-year parole period would cost an additional \$25,550. These figures do not account for inflation or increases in costs for incarceration or supervision. These dollars have been earmarked for this purpose 30 years in advance, and they are based upon the minimum costs associated with this sentence. If the incarcerated individual is not granted parole, a life term in prison could amount to as much as \$1.75 million in today's money over the next 50 years. The case is now on appeal, which means costs will continue to pile on now three and a half years later.

In addition to the direct costs incurred from the investigation and prosecution processes, local and federal governments will not receive any tax revenue from either the victim or suspect. Media reports and court documents do not indicate the victim's occupation at the time, and they indicate the suspect was likely unemployed. Based on median income data, \$123,715 in federal taxes, \$226,548 in combined FICA taxes, \$12,621 in state taxes, and \$23,160 in local taxes may be lost over the next forty years. This is without accounting for inflation or tax rate increases, and this only accounts for tax revenue losses for the victim.

All told, the government costs for this deadly shooting were at least \$1,191,324. Additional costs for the appeals process, any longer-than-minimum prison sentence, and additional tax revenue loss mean the cost is likely significantly higher. Had violence intervention services such as conflict de-escalation been provided, over \$1.1 million dollars could have been used to invest in the community, and two men would be alive and free today.

14. Information related to witness fees and time spent are limited by several documents being duplicated in the court document database. Calculations are based upon available data.

DATA SOURCES

Columbus
Ohio

Frequencies

Arrest, Charge, and Conviction Rates

Sources: [NACDL - The Trial Penalty: The Sixth Amendment Right to Trial on the Verge of Extinction and How to Save It](#), [Columbus Police Department 2022 Annual Report](#)

Notes: Arrest, charge, and conviction rates are used to determine the approximate likelihood of various costs occurring related to an incident. This allows us to approximate an “average” or weighted cost per expense, including incidents for which some costs are \$0. For example, while all shootings are assumed to involve an initial police response and investigation, only incidents in which a suspect is arrested and charged require prosecution, defense, and court costs.

Arrest rates are calculated using data published in the Columbus Division of Police Annual Report for the most recent years. Charging rates and disposition rates are sourced from the national available averages.

Police Response

Sources: Police data request

Notes: Initial police response to a homicide scene typically includes 12 Patrol, 2 Lieutenants, 3 Sergeants, 3 Commanders, and 1 Police Chief. They can remain on the scene for 6–11 hours. Fatal shooting police crime scene response costs **\$10,363**.

Initial police response to a nonfatal shooting typically includes 6 Patrol, 2 Sergeants, 1 Lieutenant, 1 Commander, and 1 Police Chief. They remain on scene for 2.5–6.5 hours. Nonfatal shooting police crime scene response costs **\$2,722**.

Scene Cleanup

Sources: [The National Cost of Gun Violence: The Price Tag For Taxpayers](#)

Notes: Average cost among competitive vendors to clean up crime scenes involving blood: **\$2,500**.

EMS Transport

Sources: [Medicaid Fee Schedule Rates](#)

Notes: The State of Ohio Medicaid reimbursement rates are used to estimate the cost for medical transport following a shooting incident. Mileage costs are calculated using an average distance between 2023 shooting incident locations and Grant Medical Center and added to the base ambulance cost. The average shooting occurred 4.43 miles from a level one trauma hospital. For fatal shootings the total cost was **\$435**; for nonfatal shootings the total cost was **\$309**.

Emergency Room / Surgery for Gunshot Victim

Sources: [National Trends and Cost Burden of Surgically Treated Gunshot Wounds in the US](#), [Firearm Injuries: Health Care Service Needs and Costs](#)

Notes: Average cost of gunshot victims requiring surgery and hospital stay: **\$50,196** (surgery, hospital stay, care). Average cost of gunshot victims requiring surgery, hospital stay, and release to outpatient care: **\$66,877** (ER, surgery, rehabilitation).

Medical Examiner's Office

Sources: [Coroner's Office 2024 Recommended Budget](#), [Franklin County Medical Examiner Firearm Report](#)

Notes: Only fatal shooting incidents require medical examiner services. Average cost of a medical examiner case is calculated by dividing the 2023 Franklin County Medical Examiner budget by the number of cases handled by the office, according to the annual Medical Examiner Firearm Report. This equals **\$3,678**.

Crime Scene Response

Medical

Police Investigation

Sources: Interview with Columbus Police Department, Internal police department data obtained from data request

Notes: The cost of police investigation is calculated by multiplying the average salary and benefits for officers assigned to the Columbus Homicide Unit by the average amount of time spent investigating fatal and nonfatal shootings. The costs associated with police investigation are **\$29,927** for fatal shootings and **\$2,560** for nonfatal shootings.



District Attorney's Office and Public Defender's Office

Sources: [How Much Do Mitigation Specialists Make?](#); [Economic Research Institute](#); [Paralegal Salary in Columbus, Ohio, United States](#); [Forensic Interviewer Salary](#); [Section 325.11 | Salary of prosecuting attorney](#); [The Buckeye Institute](#); Internal Public Defender data obtained from data request

Notes: The cost of prosecution and defense is calculated by multiplying average salary and benefits by the average amount of time spent by attorneys working on a fatal or nonfatal shooting case. The Franklin County Public Defender's Office provided specific information related to gun related cases. NICJR relied on national averages regarding time spent on fatal and nonfatal shooting cases to estimate costs for the PAO. This is weighted by the arrest rate and prosecution rate for shootings in Columbus. The costs associated with prosecution and defense are **\$49,605** for fatal shootings and **\$10,863** for nonfatal shootings.

Court Process

Sources: [Survey of Judicial Salaries](#)

Notes: The cost to the court system is calculated by multiplying hourly salaries by the average amount of time spent by judges and court staff working on a fatal or nonfatal shooting case. Judicial salaries were obtained through data provided by the National Center for State Courts. The costs associated with the court process are **\$2,075** for fatal shootings and **\$692** for nonfatal shootings.

Expert Witness Consultation

Sources: [2021 SEAK, Inc. Survey of Expert Witness Fees](#)

Notes: Expert witness costs are calculated by multiplying national average expert witness fees by specialty and service by the typical number and type of witnesses contracted for a case as specified by the Department of Public Defense. For fatal and nonfatal shooting cases, this most often includes a forensic science expert and firearms and ballistics expert. The trial rate is weighted by arrest and charging rates and is then added to the cost of case review and depositions. An expert witness costs **\$780** for both fatal and nonfatal shooting incidents.

Forensic Analysis

Sources: [Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories, 2020](#)

Notes: The cost of forensic analysis is based on nationally available data from a report that provides a cost breakdown of city-, county-, and state-level costs associated with forensic analysis. The average cost of forensic analysis for fatal and nonfatal shootings is **\$670**.

Pretrial Incarceration / Pretrial Release Supervision

Sources: [Approved Budget Summary Tables General Fund - Expenditures](#), [Franklin County Sheriff's Office 2022 Annual Report](#), Internal Franklin County Sheriff's Office data obtained from data request, [Supervision Costs Significantly Less than Incarceration in Federal System](#)

Notes: The cost of pretrial incarceration is calculated using the daily cost of incarceration in Franklin County jails according to 2023 Franklin County jail statistics, which were provided directly by the Franklin County Sheriff's Department. This cost is then weighted by the arrest rate for fatal and nonfatal shootings. The average length of stay in Franklin County jails from the Franklin County Sheriff's office is used as an estimate of detention time. For fatal shootings, it is assumed a suspect will remain incarcerated until sentencing. For nonfatal shootings, suspects are assumed to be released and then placed on pretrial release supervision. The average length of stay in Franklin County jails from the Franklin County Sheriff's office is used as an estimate of detention time. This results in a total of **\$25,873** for pretrial incarceration for fatal shooting cases. For nonfatal shooting cases, the costs are **\$1,629** for pretrial release supervision and **\$2,070** for pretrial incarceration.

Incarceration: State Prison

Sources: [Ohio Department of Corrections 2023 Annual Report](#)

Notes: The cost of state incarceration is calculated using the daily cost of incarceration according to the Ohio Department of Corrections and the average sentence for a fatal or nonfatal shooting in the state per Ohio State adult felony sentencing statistics. This cost is then weighted by the arrest rate, charging rate, and conviction rate for fatal shootings and nonfatal shootings separately. This amounts to a total of **\$569,028** for fatal shooting cases and **\$244,119** for nonfatal shooting incidents. These costs account for the total time the individual is anticipated to remain incarcerated. They do not account for inflation or increased costs of incarceration.

Parole Supervision

Sources: [Department of Rehabilitation and Correction: Post Release Control](#)

Notes: Individuals may be sentenced to a period of incarceration followed by a period of parole, depending on the charge. Average daily costs are calculated by dividing the total community corrections budget by the total community corrections average daily population. For fatal shootings, which typically result in parole supervision for life following incarceration, the length of supervision is calculated using the median length of 1,095 days as noted by Ohio Parole. As with incarceration costs, parole costs are weighted by arrest, charge, and conviction rates as well as frequency of adult suspects. This results in a total of **\$8,993** for fatal and nonfatal shooting incidents.

Victims Compensation

Sources: [2023 Crime Victim Services Annual Report](#)

Notes: Based on information obtained from the Ohio Crime Victim Services Annual Report, the average compensation award to victims of crime is **\$4,107**. This is combined with costs associated with victim/witness assistance services housed within the Prosecuting Attorney's Office, as calculated using the salary and benefits multiplied by the average hours spent on a case by victim advocates. The cost of victim advocates is **\$1,409** for fatal shooting cases and **\$131** for nonfatal shootings.

Social Service Assistance and Additional Victim Support Services

Sources: [US Department of Agriculture Fiscal Year 2024 Cost-of-Living Adjustments](#); [SNAP Eligibility](#); [Welfare Rules Databook](#); [2022 Poverty Guidelines: 48 Contiguous States](#); [Median Income](#); [SSDI: How Much in Disability Benefits Can You Get From Social Security?](#); [The Welfare Rules Database](#); HUD: [FY2024 Fair Market Rents Documentation System](#), [Fair Market Rents](#), [Income Limits](#); Medicaid: [Medicaid Spending per Enrollee](#)

Notes: A severely injured shooting victim often cannot return to work immediately. Since the victim and suspect may be major financial contributors to their households, many families may need to apply for social services support. Social Security benefits and social services for the families of victims and arrested suspects increase the total cost for victim support and social services for a fatal shooting.

SNAP, TANF, HUD, and Medicaid benefits are calculated based on pre-shooting and post-shooting incomes. Estimated household incomes prior to the shooting incident are based on median income for Black families in Columbus using US Census Bureau data. The Black household median income is used to reflect individuals most at risk for gun violence, based on national research and literature. Estimated household incomes following the shooting incident are based on income limits for social services. We intentionally use an income estimate at the top end of these guidelines to remain consistent with our conservative estimate approach.

Support services are calculated for a three-year period, consistent with the average time families receive support. Included social services are: Ohio Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), Ohio Workfirst (TANF), HUD, Medicaid, SSDI, and Social Security Survivor benefits. All program costs are calculated using mathematical formulas documented by each program, and using figures specific to the State of Ohio and the City of Columbus whenever applicable. Costs of support services for adult suspects' families are weighted by arrest rates. The cost of social service assistance and additional victim support services is **\$442,701** for fatal shootings and **\$219,054** for nonfatal shootings.

Lost Tax Revenue

Sources: [Local sales & use tax rates and changes](#), [Federal income tax rates and brackets](#), [IRS provides tax inflation adjustments for tax year 2024](#), [What Happens When States Ditch Income Tax for Sales Tax?](#), [All About the FICA Tax](#), [US Census Bureau](#)

Notes: When an individual is incarcerated, deceased, or disabled following a shooting, their family income often changes significantly. This means their family pays less in local sales, federal income, and FICA taxes. Estimated household incomes prior to the shooting incident are based on median income for Black families using US Census Bureau data. The Black household median income is used to reflect individuals most at risk for gun violence. Estimated household incomes following the shooting incident are based on income limits for social services. We intentionally use an income estimate at the top end of these guidelines to remain consistent with our conservative estimate approach.

The percentage of income used to calculate contribution to local taxes is based on National Conference of State Legislatures data; this percentage is higher for lower-income families, which is reflected in this calculation. Federal income taxes are calculated using the standard deduction to determine taxable income and 2024 marginal tax brackets. The total tax revenue loss is **\$924,591** for fatal shootings and **\$170,524** for nonfatal shootings.