

Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

THE COST

of Gun Violence

THE DIRECT COST TO TAXPAYERS

Mecklenburg County is an economic powerhouse in southwest North Carolina. It is the second largest financial center in the US and a leading manufacturer of aerospace and defense equipment. Though it is the second largest county in the state, it is home to North Carolina's largest city, Charlotte. Mecklenburg has an estimated population of 1,163,701 and is part of the larger metropolitan area of Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord. Mecklenburg's population is 43.9% White, 32.8% Black, and 15% Latino.¹

Crime in Mecklenburg County is highly concentrated in Charlotte. According to the Gun Violence Archive, Charlotte saw 97% of the county's shooting incidents between 2021–2024.² Moreover, Black people are disproportionately impacted by gun violence in Mecklenburg County, making up 81% of homicide victims but just 32.8% of the population.³ Between 2015–2020, Charlotte (and thus, Mecklenburg County) saw significant increases in homicides and gun-related assaults. The number has declined slightly since then, however, as the past three years have averaged 105 homicides, compared to 120 in 2020.⁴

When someone is shot in Mecklenburg County, there is an immediate, multifaceted, and very expensive response from an array of government agencies. The Charlotte Fire Department dispatches Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), government-contracted ambulances respond, and several units from the relevant police department descend on the scene, with an average of 23 officers responding. Investigators from the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office also often arrive, and if

the victim is declared dead on the scene, the Medical Examiner is called to transport the deceased. All of this is only for the shooting scene itself. Surviving victims are taken to Atrium Health Carolinas Medical Center or Novant Health Presbyterian Medical Center, with medical expenses frequently paid for by tax dollars through Medicaid reimbursements to the County. Victim compensation is generally provided. There is also often a lengthy investigation by the local police department and the District Attorney, who are sometimes joined by the US Attorney. With the Charlotte-Mecklenburg homicide clearance rate averaging 77% between 2022–2024, a trial and a long incarceration period frequently follow.^{5,6} When there are multiple victims and/or suspects, these efforts and costs multiply for a single shooting incident. These are just some of the costs of each shooting in Mecklenburg County.

The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) was commissioned by the Mecklenburg County Public Health Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) to conduct this detailed analysis that documents the government expenses accompanying each fatal or nonfatal shooting in the county. To do so, NICJR examined data from three police jurisdictions (the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, or CMPD; Huntersville Police Department, or HPD; and Davidson Police Department, or DPD) alongside data from County departments to create a countywide snapshot of expenses.

In tracking the direct costs per shooting incident, NICJR uses weighted average costs to capture a typical instance of a

shooting and considers this analysis to be an underestimate. For example, this study does not include changes to property value resulting from gun violence. This means that the calculated cost of \$1,826,946 for a fatal shooting in Mecklenburg is a conservative estimate. Even so, the cost of a shooting incident in Mecklenburg is higher than NICJR's national estimate of \$1,260,383.

In the past three years, Charlotte alone has averaged approximately 105 fatal shootings and 370 nonfatal shootings annually.⁷ At this rate, each year of shootings will ultimately cost taxpayers more than \$349,972,927, with both immediate costs, such as crime scene response, and longer-term costs, such as lost tax revenue and long-term incarceration. If Charlotte could reduce its gun violence rate by just 20%, that could result in local and state governments saving more than \$69,994,585 for every year of shootings. This would free up time, staff, and resources for other community support and violence reduction activities.

Mecklenburg County has taken significant steps to address gun violence, including establishing the Mecklenburg County OVP, which collaborates with County, City, and community partners to address gun violence through a public health lens. Through its Peacekeepers Academy, the OVP has helped to build the capacity of community-based organizations focused on reducing violence in Mecklenburg County. Notably, the County has also developed a comprehensive Community Violence Strategic Plan that addresses violence through a public health approach. By partnering with community-based organizations, government partners, and other stakeholders to implement the Plan, the OVP aims to reduce homicides and gun-related violence by 10% from 2022–2028, saving over 70 lives and \$200 million.

1. [US Census Bureau Quick Facts: Mecklenburg County, North Carolina](#)

2. [Gun Violence Archive](#)

3. [The Way Forward: Mecklenburg County Community Violence Strategic Plan FY2023 - FY2028](#)

4. *Ibid.*

5. Clearance rate refers to the percentage of annual homicides for which the police department has made an arrest.

6. [CMPD Year-End Statistical Reports, 2022–2024](#)

7. [City of Charlotte Open Data Portal](#)

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 Mecklenburg County, children are impacted by violence at staggeringly high rates. Mecklenburg County Public Health's Child Development Community Policing Program (CDCP) works with local law enforcement and licensed clinicians to connect with children and families impacted by violence to support and process their trauma. According to the County Department of Public Health, in 2024 alone, over 2,100 children were referred to the program. This resulted in over \$50,000 of initial crisis response, not including follow-up treatment costs.⁸

Experiencing violence, witnessing violence, and having close friends or family members victimized by violence produces 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 have significantly higher rates of poor health outcomes as they age.^{9,10} 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.

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. In "The Contagious Spread of Violence Among US Adolescents Through Social Networks," 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."¹¹

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)."¹²

Mecklenburg County Gun Violence Data

Fatal and Nonfatal Shootings in Charlotte (2022-2024)

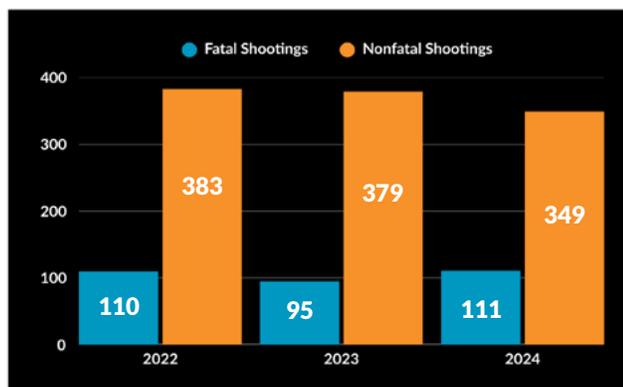
County Population

1,163,701



1,633

CMPD Police Force¹³



CMPD Homicide Clearance Rates

2022	75.7%
2023	80.0%
2024	75.0%

8. Internal Communications with Mecklenburg CDCP

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

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

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

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

13. [CMPD has 300 officer vacancies. Here's what the NAACP and FOP have to say.](#)

COST BREAKDOWN

Mecklenburg County North Carolina



CRIME SCENE RESPONSE

The crime scene response to a fatal shooting or severe nonfatal shooting typically includes a heavy police presence, fire department response, and medical transport staff. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Huntersville, and Davidson Police Departments, which respond to many of the shootings in Mecklenburg County, deploy an average of 23 officers, including patrol, homicide unit personnel, and other supervisory-level officers, to respond to a typical fatal shooting.



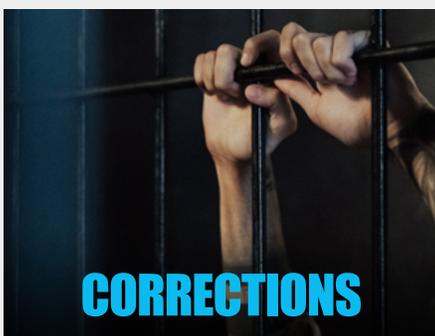
MEDICAL

Once a victim has been transported to Atrium or Novant medical centers, they accrue costs for treatment in the emergency department trauma unit, surgery, and inpatient stay. With many gunshot victims either uninsured or on Medicaid, these costs represent a tremendous strain on Mecklenburg County's hospital network. Autopsy procedures for fatal shootings add further medical costs.



CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Justice system costs include police investigation, prosecution and defense attorneys, forensic analysis, expert witness, court personnel, 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 363 days.



CORRECTIONS

Incarceration accounts for a large portion of the costs once a suspect is arrested. For a fatal shooting suspect, an average pretrial detention stay in the Mecklenburg County jail system costs \$49,882. Nonfatal shooting suspects may be detained for a shorter period before pretrial release, costing the County \$13,759 and \$1,602, respectively. Following a trial, an inmate is incarcerated within the North Carolina prison system at an average cost of \$124,882 for those convicted of attempted murder or aggravated assault and \$927,045 for those convicted of homicide. For nonfatal shooting suspects, a prison sentence may be followed by a period of parole, which may last for the rest of the individual's life following a fatal shooting, at an estimated cost of \$3,427.



VICTIM SUPPORT & SOCIAL SERVICES

Many victim support costs are covered by the North Carolina Victim Compensation Program. On average, surviving victims and families of homicide victims receive \$2,957 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 \$316,802 for a fatal shooting.



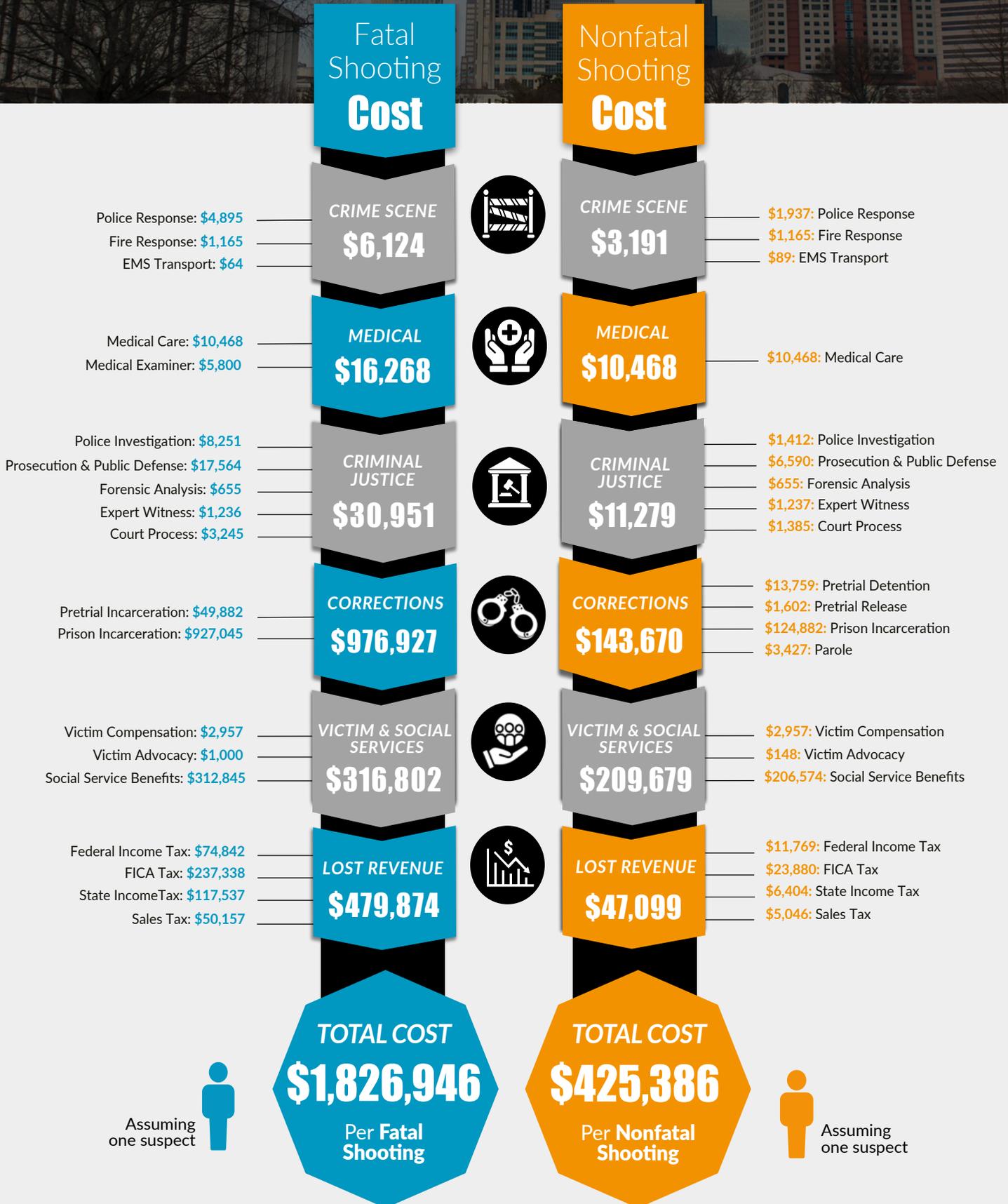
LOST TAX REVENUE

Mecklenburg County has a combined sales and use tax of 7.25%. Federal taxes use a marginal tax rate, and FICA and Social Security taxes use a flat combined rate of 15.3%. When a fatal or nonfatal shooting occurs, both income and sales tax cannot be collected from the incarcerated individual(s) or fatal shooting victim(s), and taxes collected from nonfatal shooting victims may be reduced or stopped for a time. Each incident can often represent lost tax revenue from a minimum of two individuals for 10-45 years.

Mecklenburg County, NC

THE COST PER SHOOTING

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



Assuming one suspect

Assuming one suspect

Arrest, Charge, and Conviction Rates

Sources: [2022–2023 Statistical and Operational Report of the North Carolina Trial Courts](#), [CMPD Annual Crime Statistic Reports](#), [CMPD 2022 Annual Report](#), [CMPD 2023 Annual Report](#), [CMPD 2024 Annual Report](#)

Notes: Arrest, charge, and conviction rates are used to determine the likelihood of occurrence of various costs related to an incident, 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 CMPD statistical and annual reports. Disposition rates are sourced from North Carolina Judicial Branch Statistical Reports.

Police Response

Sources: [City of Charlotte Open Data Portal](#); CMPD, HPD, DPD internal correspondence

Notes: CMPD and HPD shared internal data that did not indicate officers’ ranks but did indicate average number of units sent and time spent on scene. DPD shared detailed data by rank, indicating that about 23 sworn personnel respond to a fatal shooting, and 19 respond to a nonfatal shooting. To determine total cost, average pay rates are multiplied by the average number of hours on scene. This results in a cost of **\$4,895** for fatal shootings and **\$1,937** for nonfatal shootings.

Fire Response

Sources: [Charlotte Fire Fast Facts](#), [City of Charlotte FY2024 Adopted Budget](#)

Notes: Charlotte Fire Department, which serves several cities in Mecklenburg, has publicly available data that indicates their total budget and total incidents responded to. The average cost per call, **\$1,165** was calculated by dividing the total budget by calls responded to for the most recently available fiscal year.

EMS Transport

Sources: [Patterns in Location of Death From Firearm Injury in the US](#), [North Carolina Medicaid Fee Schedule](#)

Notes: North Carolina Medicaid reimbursement rates are used to estimate the cost for medical transport following a shooting incident. A 2023 peer-reviewed study of all non-self-inflicted firearm deaths in the US from 1999–2021 determined the proportion of individuals classified as deceased on scene is 56.6%. This percentage is used to determine the probability of receiving an Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulance ride for fatal shooting incidents. Mileage costs are calculated using an average distance between 2022–2024 shooting incident locations and Atrium Health Carolinas Medical Center and added to the base ambulance cost. For fatal shootings this is **\$64**; for nonfatal shootings this reimbursement is **\$89**. The average cost is higher for nonfatal shootings because victims in nonfatal shootings are more likely to need ambulance services.

Medical Care

Sources: Atrium Health Carolinas Medical Center internal data

Notes: Atrium Health Carolinas Medical Center receives the majority of gunshot wound victims, though Novant Presbyterian receives approximately 30% of these patients. According to internal data shared by Atrium Health, the average total encounter for patients with gunshot wounds costs **\$10,468**. This does not differentiate between fatal and nonfatal cases.

Medical Examiner's Office

Sources: Mecklenburg County Medical Examiner's Office internal documents

Notes: According to the Mecklenburg County Medical Examiner's Office (MEO), the North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner contracts with the Mecklenburg MEO to provide autopsies for the region and reimburses the County \$2,175 for each autopsy. Mecklenburg County then covers the estimated remaining \$3,625 for a total cost of \$5,800.

Police Investigation

Sources: Internal data from CMPD, HPD, and DPD; [The National Cost of Gun Violence: The Price Tag For Taxpayers](#)

Notes: The cost of police investigation is calculated by multiplying the national average amount of time spent investigating a fatal or nonfatal shooting by the average salary and benefits for detectives in the three police departments. This was \$8,251 for fatal shootings and \$1,412 for nonfatal shootings.

Prosecution and Public Defense

Sources: [National Center for State Courts \(NCSC\) Workload Assessment Study: North Carolina](#), [Salary Schedule](#), [NC House Bill 259](#)

Notes: The cost of prosecution and defense is calculated by multiplying the average salary and benefits by the average amount of time spent by attorneys, investigators, and support staff working on a fatal or nonfatal shooting case. For prosecuting attorneys and public defense attorneys, average salaries are indicated by a State House Appropriations bill. For paralegals, publicly available salary data for each compensation step are averaged to estimate the average hourly rate. Costs are weighted by arrest and charging rates for homicides and aggravated assaults. This results in a total of \$17,564 for fatal shooting cases and \$6,590 for nonfatal shooting cases.

Forensic Analysis

Sources: [2022 Annual Report NC Department of Justice](#), [NC State Budget 2022](#)

Notes: Average cost per case is calculated by dividing the NC Department of Justice Crime Lab budget by the number of cases processed. This cost is \$655.

Expert Witness Consultation

Sources: [2021 Survey of Expert Witness Fees](#)

Notes: Expert witness costs are calculated by adding together national average expert witness fees for specific specialties and services. This most often includes the Medical Examiner who performed the autopsy, other forensic science experts, and a firearms and ballistics expert. For each of these experts, the cost of trial testimony is multiplied by the frequency with which homicide and violent felony cases go to trial. This weighted trial rate is then added to the cost of case review and depositions, for a total of \$1,236 for fatal shooting cases and \$1,237 for nonfatal shooting cases.

Court Process

Sources: [NC House Bill 259](#), [Salary Schedule](#), [NCSC Workload Assessment Study: Missouri Judicial](#), [NCSC Workload Assessment Study: Minnesota](#), [Judicial Council of California Workload Assessment Study](#)

Notes: The cost to the court system is calculated by multiplying hourly salaries plus benefits by the average time spent by judges and court staff working on a fatal or nonfatal shooting case, according to national judicial workload assessments. This is weighted by arrest and charging rate, for a total of \$3,245 for fatal shooting cases and \$1,385 for nonfatal shooting cases.

Pretrial Incarceration

Sources: [2022–2023 NC Judicial Branch Annual Report](#), [Mecklenburg County 2025 Adopted Budget](#), [Safety and Justice Challenge, Understanding Trends in Jail Populations, 2014–2019: A Multi-Site Analysis](#)

Notes: The cost of pretrial incarceration is calculated using the Mecklenburg County budget, the average length of stay, and the average daily population. For fatal shootings, it is assumed a suspect will remain incarcerated until sentencing. For nonfatal shootings, suspects are assumed to be released, and the average length of stay indicated by the Pew Center is used to determine detention time. This results in a total cost of **\$49,882** for fatal shooting cases and **\$13,759** for nonfatal shooting cases.

Pretrial Release Supervision

Sources: [2022–2023 NC Judicial Branch Annual Report](#)

Notes: The daily cost of pretrial supervision is indicated by the NC Judicial branch to be \$7.91. The length of supervision is calculated using the average time from case filing to disposition minus time spent in pretrial incarceration. This cost is then weighted by the arrest rate for nonfatal shootings. Individuals arrested in fatal shooting incidents are assumed to remain in pretrial detention through case resolution and therefore do not incur pretrial release supervision costs. For nonfatal shootings with adult suspects, the calculated cost is **\$1,602**.

State Prison Incarceration

Sources: [2022-2023 NC Department of Adult Correction Annual Statistical Report](#)

Notes: The daily cost of State incarceration is indicated by the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction in their Annual Report. Time spent in pretrial incarceration is subtracted from the average sentence to account for time served. This cost is then weighted by the arrest rate, charging rate, and conviction rate for fatal and nonfatal shootings. This results in a total of **\$927,045** for fatal shooting cases and **\$124,882** for nonfatal shooting cases, for incidents with an adult suspect. These costs account for the total anticipated time the individual will remain incarcerated; they do not account for inflation or increased costs of incarceration.

Parole Supervision

Sources: [2022-2023 NC Department of Adult Correction Annual Statistical Report](#), [Structured Sentencing Statistical Report](#), [US Health Map](#)

Notes: The North Carolina Judicial Branch indicates average daily costs for supervision, and statutory mandates are used to estimate parole time for nonfatal shootings. North Carolina does not allow parole for homicide cases, so this cost is only calculated for nonfatal shooting suspects. As with incarceration costs, parole costs are weighted by arrest, charge, and conviction rates. This results in a cost of **\$3,427** for nonfatal shooting cases involving an adult suspect.

Victim Compensation

Sources: [Office of Victim Compensation Services](#)

Notes: Victim compensation costs are calculated by dividing the total amount of victim compensation paid out by the State by the total number of applications in the state that same year. This produces an average payout of **\$2,957** for all incidents, including incidents that do not result in victim compensation payment due to ineligibilities unrelated to costs.

Victim Advocacy

Sources: [Salary Schedule](#), [NCSC Workload Assessment Study: North Carolina](#)

Notes: Victim/witness assistance services are housed within the Prosecuting Attorney's Office and are calculated using salary and benefits multiplied by the average hours spent on a case by victim advocates. This results in a cost of **\$1,000** for fatal shooting cases and **\$148** for nonfatal shooting cases

Social Service Assistance

Sources: [Fiscal Year 2024 Cost-of-Living Adjustments](#), [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families](#), [How Much in Disability Benefits Can You Get From Social Security?](#), [The Welfare Rules Database](#), [FY2024 Fair Market Rents Documentation System](#), HUD Fair Market Rent webpage (taken down since referenced), [Income Limits](#), [Medicaid Spending per Enrollee](#)

Notes: Estimated household income prior to the shooting incident is based on median income for Black families in Mecklenburg County, using US Census Bureau data. The Black household median income is used to reflect individuals most at risk for gun violence, as shown in Mecklenburg County gun violence data. Estimated household income following the shooting incident is based on income limits for social services. Support services are calculated for a three-year period, consistent with the average time families receive support. Included social services are: Food and Nutrition Services (SNAP), Work First (TANF), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Medicaid, Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), and Social Security Survivor benefits. Support services for suspects' families are weighted by arrest rates.

These calculations result in a total of **\$312,845** for fatal shooting cases and **\$206,574** for nonfatal shooting cases, for incidents with an adult suspect.

Lost Tax Revenue

Sources: [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](#)

Notes: When an individual is incarcerated, deceased, or disabled following a shooting, their family income often changes significantly. This means their household pays less in local sales, federal income, social security, and Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) taxes. Estimated household income prior to the shooting incident is based on median income for Black families in Mecklenburg County, using US Census Bureau data. The Black household median income is used to reflect individuals most at risk for gun violence. Estimated household income following the shooting incident is based on income limits for social services. NICJR identifies an income estimate at the top end of these guidelines to remain consistent with a 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 for a case with an adult suspect and victim is **\$479,874** for a fatal shooting; for a nonfatal shooting it is **\$47,099**.