

## SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

# THE COST

## of Gun Violence

### THE DIRECT COST TO TAXPAYERS

The City of San Diego is a vibrant Southern California community that is home to 1,404,252 residents. Rich in history and culture, San Diego's population is 50% White, 29.6% Latino, 17.6% Asian, and 5.7% Black.<sup>1</sup>

Like many other US cities, San Diego experienced an increase in violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. The city's number of reported violent crimes increased from 12,513 in 2021 to 12,721 in 2022, primarily due to a 7% rise in aggravated assaults.<sup>2</sup> By 2023, San Diego's violent crime rate reached 3.78 per 100,000 residents, marginally surpassing the national rate of 3.74.<sup>3</sup>

As reported by the Gun Violence Archive, gun-related homicides increased by nearly 10% during the COVID-19 pandemic, from 31 in 2019 to 34 in 2020. Since 2021, San Diego has averaged approximately 28 gun homicides annually.<sup>4,5</sup> However, this violence does not impact all San Diego residents equally. From 2017 to 2022, the firearm homicide rate for Black individuals was 9.9 times greater than for White individuals, despite Black residents comprising only a small portion of the population.<sup>6</sup>

When someone is shot in San Diego, 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 San Diego Police Department (SDPD) units descend on the scene. Investigators from the San Diego County

District Attorney (DA)'s Office 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 SDPD and the San Diego District Attorney's Office, who are sometimes joined by the US Attorney. With the SDPD homicide clearance rate at 82.9% in 2024, a trial and a long incarceration period often follow. 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 San Diego.

The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) was commissioned by Shaphat Outreach to conduct this detailed analysis that documents the government expenses accompanying each fatal or nonfatal shooting in San Diego.<sup>7</sup> 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 \$4,050,966 for a fatal shooting in San Diego is a conservative estimate; the real cost is likely higher.

According to the City of San Diego 2023 Crime Report, in the past three years, San Diego has averaged approximately 48 fatal shootings and 166 nonfatal shootings annually. At this rate, each year of shootings will ultimately cost taxpayers more than \$411,213,982, with both immediate costs such as crime scene response and longer-term costs such as lost tax revenue and long-term incarceration. To truly reduce the human and financial toll of violence, the City should prioritize sustained investment in proven, community-based programs—not just reactive spending after harm has occurred. If San Diego could reduce its gun violence rate by just 20%, that could result in taxpayer savings of more than \$82 million for every year of shootings.

In recent years, the City of San Diego has taken significant steps toward reducing violence by partnering with community-based organizations and implementing programs focused on violence prevention and intervention. For example, in 2022, the City was awarded a \$3.65 million California Violence Intervention and Prevention grant to implement the Peacemaker Project.<sup>8</sup> Led by the City's Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention and carried out in collaboration with six partner organizations, the Peacemaker Project aims to address gang-related youth violence through trauma-informed violence prevention and intervention services. The city should continue to strengthen and expand its violence reduction efforts, as even modest investments in effective gun violence intervention strategies can yield significant reductions in shootings, save lives, and produce massive savings.

1. US Census Bureau Quick Facts: San Diego city, CA

2. 43 Years of Crime in the San Diego Region: 1980 Through 2022

3. San Diego County Crime Rate

4. Data available from the Gun Violence Archive

5. Gun Violence Archive data uses automated queries to compile relevant data from over 7,500 sources, including local and state police and government agencies, databases, media, and other sources.

6. San Diego County Gun Violence Reduction Community Needs Assessment Comprehensive

7. Shaphat Outreach

8. City of San Diego Secures \$3.65 Million Grant for Gang and Gun Violence Prevention Program

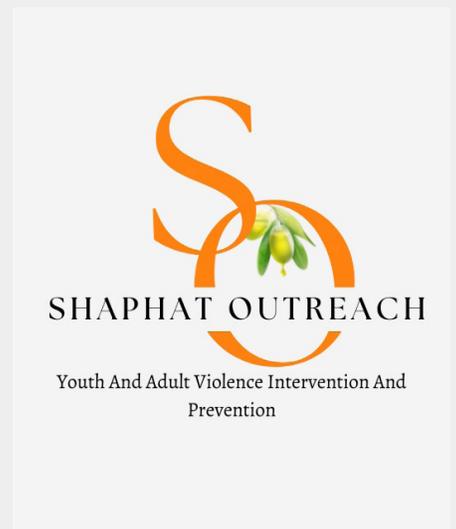


# BACKGROUND on this Report

As noted above, this report was commissioned by Shaphat Outreach, as part of its efforts to document the cost of violence on people and communities in San Diego. Shaphat Outreach is a community-based violence intervention and prevention organization that connects actively gang-involved or violence-involved individuals with services such as cognitive behavioral therapy and skill building programs. Since 2021, the City of San Diego has funded Shaphat Outreach's No Shots Fired (NSF) program, providing \$250,000 annually to support outreach to and intervention with individuals involved in gun violence. With support from former City Councilmember Monica Montgomery (who is now a County Supervisor), NSF has strengthened its partnerships with the

Mayor's Office, City Council, and SDPD. Through these partnerships, Shaphat has supported increased collaboration between government and community-based organizations and helped the City work toward sustainability of its violent reduction efforts.

Building on this progress, Shaphat Outreach emphasizes the urgent need for increased funding across the City's targeted programs that work to reduce violence in partnership with community-based organizations. Additional resources are essential to sustain existing programs, expand outreach efforts, and ensure that violence interrupters can effectively serve more at-risk individuals and neighborhoods.



## Population:

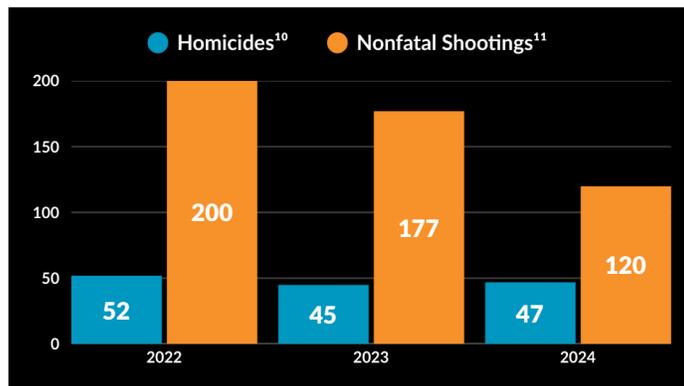
1,404,452



## Police Force:

1,870<sup>9</sup>

## Homicides and Nonfatal Shootings from 2022-2024



## Homicide Clearance Rates<sup>12</sup>

2022	80.7%
2023	84.4%
2024	82.9%

9. [The City of San Diego: Police](#)

10. [City of San Diego Crime January-December 2023](#)

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.



# The Greater **COMMUNITY COST** of **Gun Violence**

There are significant community costs of gun violence beyond the 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)."<sup>13</sup>

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."<sup>14</sup>

**"The public health approach to violence shows that, like disease, violence is a contagion that can breed in areas of social dysfunction."**

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.<sup>15,16</sup> 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.

**"Trauma negatively impacts the brain function of young people and can cause depression, behavioral challenges, academic disruption, and delinquency."**



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

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

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

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

# COST BREAKDOWN

San Diego  
California



**CRIME SCENE RESPONSE**

The crime scene response to a fatal shooting or severe nonfatal shooting typically includes a heavy police presence, EMT staff, and medical transport staff. The San Diego Police Department deploys 10 officers, including patrol, homicide unit personnel, and other supervisory-level officers, to respond to a typical fatal shooting.



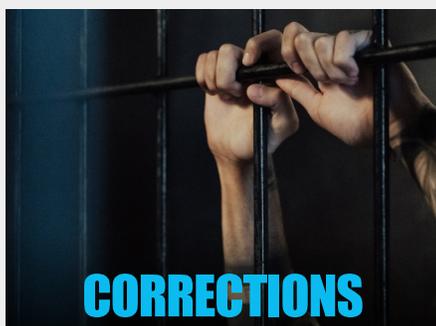
**MEDICAL**

Once a victim has been transported to the hospital, the costs of treatment in an emergency department trauma unit, surgery, inpatient stay, and rehabilitation are exorbitant. With a little more than 40% of gunshot victims either uninsured or on Medicaid, these costs represent a tremendous strain on San Diego's hospital network.



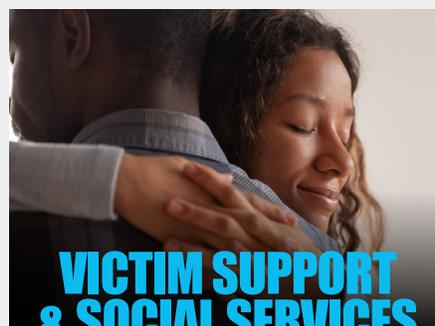
**CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

Justice system costs include police investigation, prosecution and defense attorneys, forensic analysis, 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 and nonfatal shooting cases average 245 days and 76 days, respectively.



**CORRECTIONS**

Incarceration accounts for a large portion of the costs once a suspect is arrested. A stay in the San Diego Central Jail costs an average of \$56,955 for the pretrial incarceration period for a fatal shooting. According to the San Diego Superior Court Sentencing Handbook, anyone charged with the use of a firearm and or deadly weapon is ineligible for pretrial release and must remain in custody pending adjudication.<sup>17</sup> Following a trial, an inmate may be incarcerated within the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) at an average cost of \$770,380 for those convicted of attempted murder or aggravated assault and \$1,853,953 for those convicted of homicide. 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 a cost of \$809,156.



**VICTIM SUPPORT & SOCIAL SERVICES**

Many victim support costs are covered by the California Crime Victim Compensation Program. On average, families of homicide victims and surviving victims of nonfatal shootings receive \$9,438 and \$102 (respectively) 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 \$421,133 for a fatal shooting.



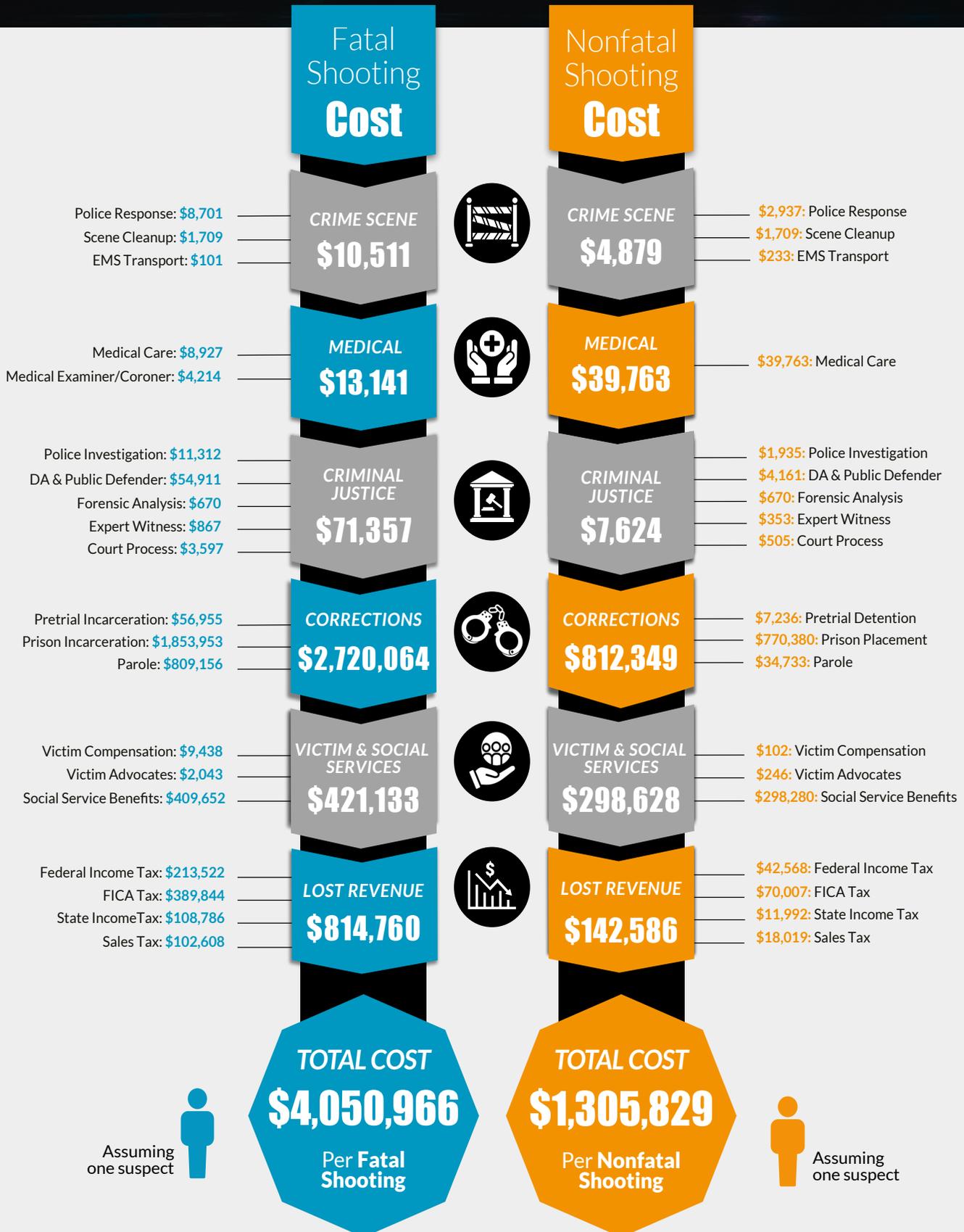
**LOST TAX REVENUE**

San Diego has a combined sales and use tax of 7.75%. Federal taxes use a marginal tax rate up to 12% for median-income families, 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 more than 30 years.

17. [San Diego Superior Court: Probation and Sentencing Handbook](#)

# THE COST PER SHOOTING

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



### Arrest, Charge, and Conviction Rates

**Sources:** San Diego County District Attorney's Office internal conviction and charge rate data, [2023 Crime Report](#), [2024 Crime Against Persons Report](#), [San Diego Remains One of the Safest, Large U.S. Cities as Crime Drops for Third Straight Year](#), [FBI Crime Data Explorer](#)

**Notes:** Arrest, charge, and conviction rates are used to determine the likelihood of various costs occurring 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 incur prosecution, defense, and court costs.

Charging and disposition were provided by the DA's Office via direct correspondence.

Arrest rates were found in the San Diego Police Department 2023 Crime Report's homicide and aggravated assault clearance rates for 2022 and 2023. The 2024 SDPD Crime Report provides these same numbers for 2024.

### Police Response

**Sources:** SDPD internal data, [San Diego Job Descriptions and Salaries](#), [FY25 Police Budget](#), [2024 Adopted Operational Budget](#), [San Diego County Sheriff's Department 2023 Annual Report](#)

**Notes:** SDPD provided information on crime scene response, including the number of people by rank who respond and how many hours each spend on scene. The salary schedule is used to calculate the hourly rate for each position. Employee benefits were found in the Department's detailed budget under fringe benefits.

### EMS Transport

**Sources:** [Patterns in Location of Death From Firearm Injury in the US](#), [County of San Diego Trauma System](#)

**Notes:** California Medicaid reimbursement rates are used to estimate the cost for medical transport following a shooting incident. Using a 2023 peer-reviewed study, the proportion of individuals not classified as deceased at the scene is used to weigh the cost of Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulance rides for fatal shootings. The Public Health Firearm Dashboard reports frequency of ambulance transport by severity. For nonfatal shootings, these frequencies are used to weigh the cost of ALS, Basic Life Support Services, and EMS response with no transportation because the victim did not accept or require transport. Mileage costs are calculated using an average distance between shooting incident locations and locations within the San Diego County Trauma System.

### Scene Cleanup

**Sources:** [San Diego County DA Victim Services](#)

**Notes:** The San Diego District Attorney's Office notes that victims of crime are eligible for a State Victims Compensation Board claim payment of up to **\$1,709** for the cost of crime scene cleanup.

### Hospital Care

**Sources:** [CDC WISQARS Cost of Injury](#)

**Notes:** The cost for medical care is estimated using CDC data on the national number of fatal firearm homicides per state and their associated costs. Cost for medical care in fatal and nonfatal shootings is estimated using the most recent (2023) national CDC data, taking the number of shootings with hospitalizations, number of shootings that were treated and released, average costs of hospitalization, and average costs of treatment and release.

### Medical Examiner's Office

**Sources:** [San Diego Medical Examiner 2023 Annual Statistical Report](#)

**Notes:** Notes: The average cost of a medical examiner case is calculated by dividing the 2023 San Diego Medical Examiner's budget by the number of cases handled by the Office, according to the County of San Diego Medical Examiner.

## Police Investigation

**Sources:** SDPD internal data, [San Diego Salary Table](#)

**Notes:** The cost of police investigation is calculated by multiplying the average amount of time spent investigating a fatal or nonfatal shooting by the average salary and benefits for detectives in the SDPD, based on the San Diego Salary Table. SDPD provided information regarding personal and time spent on fatal and nonfatal investigations via email correspondence.

## Prosecution and Public Defense

**Sources:** [Deputy District Attorney](#), [Forensic Interviewer Salary](#) (link inactive when report was published), [Investigator Job Summary](#), [Mitigation Specialist](#), [San Diego Job Descriptions and Salaries](#), [NCSC Workload Assessment Study: North Carolina](#), [NCSC Workload Assessment Study: New Mexico](#)

**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. Salaries are taken from publicly available salary schedules and job postings. For each position (prosecuting attorneys, public defense attorneys, paralegals, legal secretaries, mitigation specialists, investigators, and forensic interviewers), salaries for each compensation step are averaged to estimate the average position hourly rate from publicly available salary data. Hourly salary and benefits are combined for each position and multiplied by the national average amount of time spent per homicide and violent felony case. These costs are weighted by arrest and charging rates for homicides and aggravated assaults.

## Forensic Analysis

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

**Notes:** Locally specific information on forensic analysis was not available. The cost used here is based on NICJR's National Cost of Gun Violence analysis, which provides an average cost from jurisdictions around the country.

## Expert Witness Consultation

**Sources:** [2021 Survey of Expert Witness Fees](#); San Diego County District Attorney's Office internal trial data

**Notes:** Expert witness costs are calculated by multiplying national average expert witness fees (for specific specialties and services) by the typical number and type of witnesses contracted for a case, as specified by San Diego District Attorney's Office. This most often includes a forensic science expert and 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.

## Court Process

**Sources:** [NCSC Workload Assessment Study: Missouri Judicial](#), [NCSC Workload Assessment Study: Minnesota](#), [Judicial Council of California Workload Assessment Study](#), [Annual Salaries for State Bar Court Judges](#), [San Diego County Sheriff's Office Salary and Benefits](#), [San Diego Salary Table](#), [San Diego Superior Court Offers Incentives to Recruit & Retain Court Reporters](#)

**Notes:** The cost to the court system is calculated by multiplying San Diego County judges and court staff hourly salaries, including benefits, by the average amount of 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.

The judicial salary is taken from the State Bar of California. The bailiff's salary come from the San Diego County Sheriff's Office Salary and Benefits. The court clerk salary comes from the County Salary table. The court reporter salary is taken from a San Diego Superior Court website.

### Pretrial Incarceration

**Sources:** San Diego Office of the Public Defender internal data, [San Diego County Sheriff's Department 2023 Annual Report](#), [Process of a Felony Case](#)

**Notes:** The cost of pretrial incarceration is calculated using the San Diego Sheriff's budget and average daily population from the 2023 Annual Report. Based on information from the San Diego Superior Court, it is assumed that all suspects remain in custody pending adjudication. For nonfatal shootings, this time is estimated as 76.5 days, based on the direct correspondence with the Office of the Public Defender. This duration was not available for fatal shootings in San Diego, so the number used is based on national averages.

### Pretrial Release Supervision

**Sources:** [San Diego Superior Court Probation and Sentencing Handbook](#), [Public Safety Allocations in the San Diego Region](#)

**Notes:** Pretrial release supervision is not included in the calculated costs, as under the Probation and Sentencing Handbook, a person charged with the use of a firearm and or deadly weapon is disqualified from this process.

### Incarceration: State Prison

**Sources:** [Offender Data Points](#), [2023-2024 Corrections Budget](#)

**Notes:** Data on the average length of incarceration for individuals convicted of fatal and nonfatal shootings are taken from CDCR's Offender Data Points. Fatal shooting length of stay is based on the average for individuals sentenced to life with and without parole. For individuals convicted of nonfatal shootings, the estimates are an average of determinate sentences, second striker sentences, and third striker sentences.

The cost of State incarceration is calculated using Offender Data Points and the 2023-2024 CDCR Corrections Budget. This cost is then weighted by the arrest rate, charging rate, and conviction rate for fatal and nonfatal shootings, respectively. 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:** [US Health Map](#), [2023-2024 Corrections Budget](#), [Monthly Total Population Report Archive](#), [NICJR Gun Violence Assessment reports](#)

**Notes:** Average daily costs are calculated by dividing the total community corrections budget by the total community corrections average daily population (ADP). For fatal shootings, which typically result in parole supervision for life following incarceration, the length of supervision is calculated using the national average age of arrest for shooting incidents (according to previous NICJR Gun Violence Assessment reports), average prison sentence, and average life expectancy. For nonfatal shootings, statutory mandates are used to estimate parole time. As with incarceration costs, parole costs are weighted by arrest, charge, and conviction rates.

### Victim Compensation

**Sources:** [North Carolina Assistant District Attorney/Victim Witness Legal Assistant Workload Assessment](#), [A Workload Assessment Study for the New Mexico Trial Court Judiciary](#), [County of San Diego Job Descriptions and Salaries](#), [2023 Crime in California](#), [CALVCB Annual Report 2023-2024 Supplemental Statistics](#), [San Diego District Attorney's Office](#)

**Notes:** Victim compensation costs are calculated by dividing the total amount of victim compensation paid out by the State for homicides by the total number of homicides in the state that same year. The same calculation is carried out for assaults. This produces an average payout amount for all incidents, including incidents that do not result in victim compensation payment due to ineligibilities unrelated to costs.

This is combined with costs associated with victim advocate services housed within the District Attorney's Office, which are calculated using the salary and benefits for a Victim Advocate multiplied by the average hours spent on a case.

### Social Service Assistance

**Sources:** [FY24 Cost-of-Living Adjustments](#), [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families](#), [How Much in Disability Benefits Can You Get From Social Security?](#), [The Welfare Rules Database](#), [FY 2024 Fair Market Rent Documentation System](#), [Income Limits](#), [Medicaid Spending per Enrollee](#), [US Census Bureau San Diego city Median Income in the Past 12 Months](#)

**Notes:** Estimated household incomes prior to the shooting incident are based on median income for Latino families in San Diego using US Census Bureau data. The Latino household median income is used to reflect individuals most at risk for gun violence, as shown in San Diego gun violence data. Estimated household incomes following the shooting incident are based on income limits for social services. NICJR intentionally uses an income estimate at the top end of these guidelines to remain consistent with a conservative estimate approach. Support services are calculated for a three-year period, consistent with the average time families receive support. Included social services are: CALFresh (SNAP), CALWorks (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 San Diego whenever applicable. Support services for suspects' families are weighted by arrest rates.

### 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 family pays less in local sales, federal income, and FICA taxes. Estimated household incomes prior to the shooting incident are based on the median income for Latino families using US Census Bureau data. The Latino 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. 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.

