

WASHINGTON, DC

THE COST

OF GUN VIOLENCE

THE DIRECT COST TO TAXPAYERS

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 2012¹. 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.

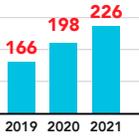
¹ District Crime Data at a Glance | mpdc



WASHINGTON, DC COST BREAKDOWN

POPULATION

689,545



HOMICIDES

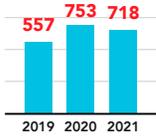
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HOMICIDE CLEARANCE

POLICE FORCE

DC Metro PD



INJURY SHOOTINGS

SOURCE: DC Metro Police Department ([Link](#))

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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 ONSF 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.



1 CRIME SCENE RESPONSE

The response to a severe injury shooting or homicide scene usually includes a heavy police presence, Fire/EMT response, along with medical transport. Based on national averages for a police response to a crime scene and follow up investigation, the Washington DC Metro Police Department, could deploy up to 15 officers, including Patrol, Homicide Unit, and other supervisory level officers, respond to a typical homicide shooting.



2 HOSPITAL & REHABILITATION

Once a victim has been transported to the hospital, the cost of the Trauma Unit, surgery, and rehabilitation, are exorbitant. Costs can range from \$88K to \$144K per incident. With a little more than 40% of gunshot victims either uninsured or on Medicaid the Cost of Violence includes a tremendous strain on the District's hospital network.



3 CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Police investigation, a trial or court process that includes prosecution and defense costs, and court staff, make up the many costs of the court process in injury shooting and homicide cases. Due to the consequences of a homicide conviction, these cases often go to trial. Sometimes these cases involve multiple suspects with multiple court dates and separate trials. From the time of arrest, court proceedings in an injury shooting or homicide case can take two years.



4 INCARCERATION

Incarceration accounts for a large portion of the costs once a suspect is arrested. A stay in the District of Columbia Department of Corrections Jail system costs on average \$315 per day. Suspects can remain in the local jail system for two years until trial, sentencing, and placement into the federal prison system. The Federal Bureau of Prisons system costs \$107 per day to house an inmate; incarceration costs of individuals convicted of attempted murder or homicide range from \$543K to over \$1.1M.



5 VICTIM SUPPORT

The majority of these costs are covered by the DC Court's Crime Victim Compensation program. Costs can range from \$45K to \$68k per victim, and include burial expenses, lost wages for a year, medical expenses, and counseling. Other costs in this category include District services, including social services and autopsy costs, and the long-term cost of families losing a financial contributor.



6 LOST TAX REVENUE

The District has an income tax rate with a \$400 flat fee plus 6% of any income over \$10K for people that make \$30K/year. The sales use tax is 6%, with variations by product type. When an injury shooting or homicide occurs, the District loses the ability to collect taxes (both income and sales tax) from the incarcerated individuals and homicide victims. Each incident can represent lost tax revenue of a minimum of two individuals, from 10 to 20 years.

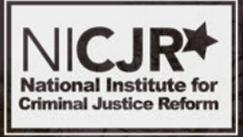


WASHINGTON
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



The Cost Per Shooting

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



Homicide Cost

Injury Shooting Cost

CRIME SCENE

\$6,994

\$2,352 Police Response

\$2,500 Scene Cleanup

\$2,142 Fire/EMT



CRIME SCENE

\$5,962

\$1,320 Police Response

\$2,500 Scene Cleanup

\$2,142 Fire/EMT

HOSPITAL

\$88,525

\$1,428 EMR/Trauma Center

\$87,097 Gunshot Surgery



HOSPITAL

\$144,617

\$1,428 EMR/Trauma Center

\$87,097 Gunshot Surgery

\$56,092 Rehabilitation

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

\$201,960

17,200 Police Investigation

\$168,920 DA & Public Defender

\$15,840 Court Process



CRIMINAL JUSTICE

\$20,256

\$860 Police Investigation

\$17,236 DA & Public Defender

\$2,160 Court Process

INCARCERATION

\$1,071,847

\$229,950 Pre-Trial Incarceration

\$841,897 Prison Placement



INCARCERATION

\$543,214

\$229,950 Pre-Trial Incarceration

\$313,264 Prison Placement

VICTIM SUPPORT

\$69,368

\$8,616 Coroner's Office

\$29,000 Victim of Crimes

\$31,752 Receiving Social Service Benefits
(one year support for two families)



VICTIM SUPPORT

\$44,876

\$29,000 Victim of Crimes

\$15,876 Receiving Social Service Benefits
(one year support for one family)

LOST REVENUE

\$87,760

\$87,760 Sales Tax Revenue
(both suspect & murder victim)



LOST REVENUE

\$24,134

\$24,134 Sales Tax Revenue

★ **total cost based on two suspects**
\$3.1M
per **homicide** shooting

\$1.53M
Per **Homicide** Shooting
per one suspect

\$783K
Per **Injury** Shooting
per one suspect

★ **total cost based on two suspects**
\$1.6 M
per **injury** shooting

Data Sources

WASHINGTON
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



CRIME SCENE	Subject:	Police Response	Fire/EMT Transport	Scene Clean Up
	Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District of Columbia Employee Salaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DC Fire and EMS Department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aftermath BioOne
	Notes	<p>Nationally, initial police response to a homicide scene typically includes 6 Patrol, 1 Lieutenant, 2 Sergeants, and 6 Detectives. They remain on-scene between 2-6 hours.</p> <p>Initial police response to an injury shooting scene typically includes 6 Patrol, 1 Sergeant, and 2 Detectives. They remain on-scene between 2-6 hours.</p>	<p>Fire & EMS Budget FY20 = \$220.7 Million Total Fire and EMS Incidents FY20 = 193,203 Total number of EMS incidents FY20 = 163,998 (84.9%) of all incidents Average cost per response = \$2,142 (# of EMS incidents / \$187.4 million)</p>	<p>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</p>
HOSPITAL	Subject:	ER/ Surgery for Gun-Shot Victim		
	Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<p>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 who required surgery, a hospital stay, and were released to rehabilitation centers = \$144,667 (ER cost, surgery & rehabilitation cost) Formula for this study: (Base cost + surgery cost - 1/5 (20%) of surgery cost) = \$70,860 per shooting victim requiring surgery and rehabilitation.</p>		
CRIMINAL JUSTICE	Subject:	Police Investigation	DA & Public Defender	Court Process
	Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparative interviews with police departments across the nation. Metropolitan PD Salary Schedule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estimates of Time Spent in Capital and Non Capital Murder Cases US Courts Staff Attorney Public Defender Service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DC Superior Court Court Personnel System Pay Rates (Link)
	Notes	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$43/hr (2 Detectives) x 10 hours = \$860 \$43/hr (2 Detectives) x 200 hours = \$17,200 	<p>1087 hours to defend & prosecute a murder case x \$111 (DA \$61/hr + PD \$50/hr) = \$120,657 + 40% overhead = \$168,920 To defend an attempted murder case requires 1/7 of the time (155 hours) = \$17,236</p>	<p>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 \$360 x 6 hours (A felony) = \$2,160</p>
INCARCERATION	Subject:	Pre-Trial Incarceration	State Prison (Attempted Murder)	State Prison (Murder Case)
	Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District of Columbia Department of Corrections GF Budget District of Columbia Department of Corrections Fact Sheet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal Bureau of Prisons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> United States Sentencing Commission Guidelines
	Notes	<p>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 the Department of Corrections upon sentencing and placement into Federal Bureau of Prisons. \$315/day x 2 years = \$229,950</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>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</p>
VICTIM SUPPORT	Subject:	Victim of Crimes	Social Service Assistance	Medical Examiner's Office
	Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DC Court's Crime Victim Compensation Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DC Department of Human Services SNAP eligibility award = \$658 for family of 3 DC TANF award = \$665 for family of 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DC Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) DC OCME Budget
	Notes	<p>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 Injury Shooting Victim: \$10,000 for victim lost wages for 1 year \$9,000 mental health Total = \$19,000</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>District of Columbia FY 20 Coroner's Budget was \$14.1 million. The District of Columbia Office of Chief Medical Examiner conducted 1,639 full/partial autopsies in FY20. The cost per autopsy = \$8,616</p>
LOST REVENUE	Subject:	Lost Tax Revenue (One person going to jail)	Lost Tax Revenue (Murder: Loss Revenue for 2 people)	
	Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District of Columbia Office of Tax and Revenue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District of Columbia Office of Tax and Revenue 	
	Notes	<p>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</p>	<p>District income tax for a person earning \$30K/year = \$1,600 (\$400 plus 6% of the excess over \$10K (\$20K))</p> <p>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 (\$2,194x 20 years x 2 people)</p>	