

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510-1304

December 13, 2018

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump,

As you prepare your Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request, I urge you to use this budget framework as an opportunity to support efforts to help reduce gun violence in Chicago, rather than scapegoating the city's challenges to promote ideological political agendas. I urge you to prioritize federal support and resources that will help Chicago reduce violence by expanding economic opportunities and addressing health and education disparities in the hardest-hit communities.

The number of shootings and homicides that Chicago continues to experience is tragic and unacceptable. But while it may be easy to tweet about the problem, generating real and measurable solutions to help Chicago reduce gun violence requires more than 140 characters. Reducing violence in Chicago requires a comprehensive approach involving partnerships with local education and health officials, law enforcement, community stakeholders, and the federal government. Through sustained and targeted investment of federal funding in underserved communities, the federal government can play an integral role in addressing the economic and societal issues that contribute to violence.

### **Housing and Economic Development**

Violence in Chicago is often located in communities with higher unemployment and years of neglect and disinvestment. Two of the most important ways the federal government can help break the cycle of violence and provide stability in these neighborhoods is by ensuring access to safe, affordable housing and encouraging economic and community development. Increasing funding for the HOME Investment Partnerships Program—the largest federal block grant designed exclusively to create affordable housing for low-income households—will help provide housing in areas where there is access to quality education and jobs. In 2016, the HOME program was projected to provide more than 8,000 low-income and moderate-income families in Chicago with affordable housing. Further investment in programs like the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative and Community Development Block Grants can help revitalize neighborhoods, attracting businesses and creating much needed jobs. Providing reliable access to job opportunities is also crucial, which is why more federal funding for programs like Core Capacity Grants is needed to modernize and expand public transportation.

## **Job Opportunities**

When young people are chronically unemployed, it increases the likelihood that they will become involved in crime. I urge you to prioritize important youth mentoring and job training programs at the U.S. Departments of Labor, Justice, and Education that pursue innovative strategies for connecting young people to career pathways. The Department of Labor's 2016 Summer Jobs and Beyond Grant Program helped Chicago expand its summer employment program and provide extended work opportunities for 300 at-risk youth. Increasing funding for job training, including youth programs under Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, will prepare more young adults to successfully transition into the workforce. Importantly, youth employment programs in Chicago also have been found to dramatically reduce violent crime arrests. I also urge you to strengthen mentoring and violence prevention initiatives at the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and boost funding for recidivism reduction programs under the federal Second Chance Act.

## **Education**

Quality education is the cornerstone of economic opportunity, and it is vital to start early to be cost-effective and have the most impact. I urge you to make strong federal investments in high-quality early childhood education, such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Head Start, Early Head Start, IDEA Part B-619 and Part C, and the Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five. These core programs support continuous access to high-quality early childhood education from birth through age five that prepares at-risk children with a strong foundation—through academic, physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development—to succeed in school and life. Knowing their child is safe and learning in a high-quality early learning program also allows parents to complete their higher education and thrive in the workforce. In 2014, these programs served over 630,000 Illinois children under age six and employed more than 69,000 people in full-time jobs.

I also urge you to support resources for Chicago's highest-need K-12 students through expanded investments in Titles I and IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Title I provides federal resources to schools with high concentrations of students in poverty, who are more likely to suffer toxic stress including from violence, racial discrimination, family separation, and food insecurity. Title IV provides resources to ensure all students are safe, healthy, and have access to a holistic well-rounded education, which includes trauma-informed classroom management, school-based mental health programs, mentoring and school counseling, and computer science. Increasing the investment in mentorship programs under ESEA and the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act would broaden the support system for at-risk students to help them successfully transition to high school, college, and the workforce. Together, more resources for these programs will equip students, families, and communities with the necessary tools to heal from trauma and break the cycle of violence.



## **Public Health**

Combating Chicago's community violence is not just an economic or education issue—it is also a serious public health matter. One of the best ways to tackle this crisis is by supporting strong families, building environments that promote health, and starting early to prevent and mitigate the effects of experiencing trauma. In order to address these social determinants of health, I urge you to provide in your budget tools for communities to promote health through the Administration for Children & Families (ACF), including robust funding for Community and Social Service Block Grants. Harmful childhood environments can shape lifelong health and behaviors, which is why I also urge you to invest in maternal and child health promotion programs at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), including providing strong funding for the Maternal & Child Health Block Grant. I urge you to increase support for mental health and substance use disorder prevention and treatment programs at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), including the National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative, Project AWARE, and the new Interagency Task Force on Trauma-Informed Care. In addition, improving data collection and research by supporting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program and Youth Violence Prevention Program is vital to understanding how best to target our efforts.

## **Community Policing**

And finally, we cannot reduce violence in Chicago unless we have an effective community policing strategy where law enforcement officers are properly trained and resourced, where there is a relationship of trust and cooperation between law enforcement and the communities they serve, and where we close gaps in our gun laws that make it easy for dangerous people to get their hands on guns. For too long your administration has attempted to use federal law enforcement grant funding as a bargaining chip in an effort to force unrelated policy changes. These attempts have repeatedly been rejected by federal courts, and they must stop. It is time for your administration to provide Chicago with the law enforcement funding that the City is owed under formulas set by Congress. Further, I urge your administration to stop standing in the way of critical policing reforms and gun safety reforms that enjoy broad support and that would help enhance community policing and public safety.

The President's Budget Request is an important reflection of the Administration's priorities and the direction that the President hopes to take the country. You have routinely cited the tragedy of gun violence in Chicago during your tweets and public comments, but now is the time for action. I urge you to use your Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request to reflect support for real solutions to this urgent problem by increasing investment in federal programs that will help stop violence, save lives, and lift people out of poverty. Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,



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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator