

Opening Statement
Chairwoman Anna G. Eshoo
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “A Public Health Crisis: The Gun Violence Epidemic in America”
October 3, 2019

Welcome to the very first Energy and Commerce hearing on gun violence as a public health issue.

First, I'd like to recognize the members of the Committee who represent the Chicago region. Representative Bobby Rush whose District we are in, Congresswomen Robin Kelly and Jan Schakowsky, and our Republican colleague, Representative Adam Kinzinger, thank you for your leadership and for participating in this hearing today.

We're grateful to and welcome our Congressional colleagues who represent the Chicago region and are guests of the Committee today: Representatives Danny Davis, Sean Casten, and Chuy Garcia.

One hundred Americans are killed with a gun and hundreds more are shot and injured every day. Millions of Americans have seen a shooting, buried a loved one, or live in fear of what could happen next, and some are here with us today.

They are in the audience, they are at our witness table, and they are on the dais as Members of Congress.

Your heartbreak moves us to work with purpose.

We're here to treat American gun violence for what it is – an epidemic, and to treat an epidemic, we must study it, understand what works to prevent it, and learn how to treat the trauma caused by it.

We know that a public health approach can work. Consider antismoking efforts or preventing injuries from car crashes. We've achieved life-saving results through funding data analysis, encouraging research, and adopting commonsense product improvements with these epidemics.

Another simple yet profound and proven method is listening to people from the communities most affected by the public health threat.

We're here in Chicago's South Side where so many have lived with the epidemic of gun violence for decades. I thank Congressman Bobby Rush for inviting our Committee to hold this hearing in Chicago and for his years of work to address gun violence.

Gun homicide is the leading cause of death for African American boys and men ages 15 to 34, and the second leading cause of death for Hispanic boys and men ages 15 to 34.

African American men make up 52% of all gun homicide victims, despite only being seven percent of the U.S. population.

Compared to the rate of gun homicides for white boys and men of the same ages, the rate for African Americans is 21 times greater, and the rate for Hispanic men is nearly four times greater.

Notably, the communities most impacted by gun violence are the most knowledgeable about how to treat and prevent it.

It's why our witnesses include Mr. Spencer Leak, Sr., owner of a family-run funeral home in the Chatham neighborhood who has comforted hundreds of families whose loved ones have been killed by a gun.

It's why we're listening to Pastor Brenda Mitchell and Mr. Norman Kerr who've taken their experiences with gun violence and used it to promote common-sense, evidence-based policies.

And, it's why we're hearing from the physicians who work every day to heal the physical, mental, and generational trauma from shootings and see the human beings whose bodies are ravaged by gun violence.

Today's hearing will not be enough to stop the daily violence. We need to provide money for public health research.

I'm proud the House voted to provide \$50 million for gun violence research at the CDC and NIH. The Senate needs to do the same.

I want to thank Congresswoman Robin Kelly for introducing H.R. 1114, legislation that requires the U.S. Surgeon General to provide an annual report to Congress on the public health impacts and the costs of gun violence in America. I hope our hearing today helps that bill come closer to being law.

Again, I thank each Member of Congress, our witnesses, and our audience for joining us today. Your presence and testimony will fuel our action.