

**Testimony of Norman Livingston Kerr
before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on the House Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Health**

October 3, 2019

I'd like to thank the Subcommittee for holding this important hearing on community responses to gun violence. Let me start by introducing myself – my name is Norman Kerr, and I'm the new Director of Violence Prevention under Mayor Lightfoot's Office of Public Safety.

Since day one, Mayor Lightfoot has been clear that her highest priority and greatest responsibility as Mayor is ensuring peace and safety in all of Chicago's neighborhoods. And each and every day since May 20th, the Mayor's Office of Public Safety has been building on our comprehensive violence reduction strategy with the goal of measurably reducing gun violence.

Chicago finds itself in a unique period.

In 2016, the City suffered a dramatic increase in shootings and homicides more severe than that experienced by any of the other five largest American cities over the past 25 years. The vast majority of these homicides were committed with illegal guns.

Across Chicago, communities have been devastated by the hundreds of homicides and by the thousands of non-fatal shootings that occur each year. In addition to long-lasting trauma, estimates of the direct and indirect economic costs run to billions of dollars per year.

Since 2016, the trends have improved. Shootings and homicides have seen double-digit year-over-year decreases two years in a row. In fact, over this past summer, we saw an accelerated decrease in violent crimes – with June, July and August seeing the lowest number of shooting victims since 2014.

And while many organizations are tackling gun violence independently of City leadership, through various privately funded frameworks, the experience of peer cities shows that violence reduction efforts are far more successful through effective coordination of resources, policy, and management decisions across all stakeholders.

Mayor Lightfoot's commitment to promoting safe communities and reducing gun violence is evident in her appointment of Deputy Mayor for Public Safety Susan Lee, who leads the City's first-ever Office of Public Safety. As the Mayor's point person for all anti-violence efforts, the Deputy Mayor is responsible for public safety oversight and operations, with activities grounded in three areas:

- Leading a comprehensive violence reduction strategy by collaborating with street outreach and other community-based anti-violence organizations while also ensuring coordination with city agencies and the Chicago Police Department.
- Guiding public safety agency operations, including Chicago Police Department, Chicago Fire Department, Office of Emergency Management and Communications, Civilian Office of Police

Accountability, and Police Board; managing consent decree reform priorities; leading gun policy strategy, and liaising with State and County governments.

- Building on data and research critical to policy decisions, including regular analysis and review of violence trends as well as evaluation of violence reduction initiatives.

As core components of its initial efforts, the Mayor's Office has convened bi-weekly regional coordination meetings on the West Side and South Sides, facilitated broad yet targeted collaboration across City agencies through monthly Public Safety Cabinet meetings, and launched the GunStat Initiative, an unprecedented collaborative effort with the U.S. Department of Justice, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, the Office of Cook County Sheriff and other major partners that is designed to track gun offenders in order to identify trends and strengths, and address any weaknesses within the criminal justice system.

We have embarked on a proactive strategy that looks at gun violence as a public health crisis, which is what it is. While we continue to see consistent reductions of violent crime throughout the City, Mayor Lightfoot will be the first one to say it: we have much more work to do.

Together, we have to re-stitch our broken social safety net.

We have to work on providing wraparound services and job training in the neighborhoods that have been under siege and economically distressed for decades.

We recognize the fact that this will not be solved overnight.

But by investing in neighborhoods and addressing the root causes of gun violence, we can continue to make meaningful gains in public safety in communities throughout the city.

We'll continue working with Chicagoans from every neighborhood and background — from block clubs and faith groups to businesses and school communities — who have joined us hand-in-hand in our multifaceted, comprehensive approach to reducing the violence in our city.

Continued improvement for the people of Chicago will also take cooperation by all levels of government. I look forward to working with this Committee to further policies and programs that create and maintain safe communities for our families to thrive.