

**Testimony of Niva Lubin-Johnson, MD**  
**Immediate Past President, National Medical Association**  
**United States House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Energy and Commerce- Health Subcommittee**  
**Field Hearing- Chicago, IL**  
**“A Public Health Crisis: The Gun Violence Epidemic in America”**  
**October 3, 2019**

Good morning. I am Dr. Niva Lubin-Johnson and I would like to thank Energy and Commerce Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr., Health Subcommittee Chairwoman Anna G. Eshoo and **all** Health Subcommittee Members for holding this field hearing today, **in Chicago**. I would especially like to thank Subcommittee Member Congressman Bobby Rush who is my Congressman, as well as Congresswoman Robin Kelly, who I have had the pleasure of working with quite frequently, on myriad health issues confronting our community.

I am here today to discuss policies and solutions to the public health threat posed by gun violence, not only as a Physician who has practiced internal medicine for over 30 years here in Chicago, but also as the Immediate Past President of the National Medical Association (NMA). NMA is the largest and oldest national organization representing the interests of over 50,000 African American physicians, and their patients, in the United States. We are the collective voice of African American physicians and the leading force for parity and justice in medicine and the elimination of disparities in health.

Gun Violence has been a key issue for NMA and continues to be on the forefront this year, as it was throughout my NMA presidency.

Gun violence is one of the leading causes of death in America, where more than 39,000 people die by guns every year and 85,000 more suffer non-fatal gun injuries.<sup>1</sup> Gun violence costs the American economy \$229 billion

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<sup>1</sup> 1.CDC. WISQARSTM. Report run 24 February 2018. Atlanta, GA: CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Available at: [http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/dataRestriction\\_inj.html](http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/dataRestriction_inj.html).

annually.<sup>2</sup> The societal costs of firearm assault injury include work loss, medical/mental health care, emergency transportation, police/criminal justice activities, insurance claims processing, employer costs and decreased quality of life. In Chicago, according to *The Chicago Tribune*, while shootings and homicides have decreased in 2019, there have been at least 300 homicides this year and 1,600 people shot, as of August 6<sup>th</sup>. During the 1<sup>st</sup> weekend of July, alone, at least 52 people were wounded — 8 fatally.<sup>3</sup> While there are many causation factors surrounding the depth of the gun violence in Chicago, according to U.S. News and World Report, about 60 percent of illegal firearms seized and recovered by Chicago police come from out of state. They're traced back to states with less restrictive firearms regulations, with Indiana at the top of the list.<sup>4</sup>

In November of last year, the National Rifle Association (NRA) had the audacity to tweet “Someone should tell self-important anti-gun doctors to stay in their lane”, after the American College of Physicians released a report calling gun violence a public health crisis. Physicians, including NMA, countered, “This **IS** our Lane” and more than 40 medical organizations have since joined forces as a coalition to raise money to confront the firearm related death and injury epidemic, as a public health initiative.

Gun violence hit very close to home for our organization after the tragic Chicago shooting of award-winning NMA member, Dr. Tamara O’Neal outside of Mercy Hospital, later that same month of November. Dr. O’Neal was killed by her ex-fiancé, who proceeded to also kill a pharmacy resident, Dayna Less and Chicago police officer, Samuel Jimenez.

Dr. O’Neal was a graduate of the University of Illinois, College of Medicine in Chicago (2014), completed her emergency medicine residency in 2017 and at the time of this unforeseen tragedy, was an ER attending at Chicago’s Mercy Hospital and Medical Center.

In response to the tragic domestic violence shooting of Dr. O’Neal,

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<sup>2</sup> Follman M, Lurie J, Lee J, West J. The true cost of gun violence in America. Mother Jones. Available at: <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/04/true-cost-of-gun-violence-in-america/>. Accessed Feb 29 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Chicago Sun Times- July 3, 2019

<sup>4</sup> The Myths and Truths About Chicago's Guns and Murder Rate, *U.S. News and World Report*, December 10, 2018

The Emergency Medicine (EM) Section of the NMA has made Social Advocacy and Violence Prevention a standing theme on their annual program. They have dedicated a Tamara O'Neal Social Justice Memorial lecture named in her memory to continue this important advocacy work.

NMA has long been an advocate of stemming gun violence in our communities and the country at large. We are in full agreement with the American College of Physicians that gun violence and violence prevention is a public health crisis, which we believe demands a multifaceted approach:

- In 2017, we published an NMA position paper on gun violence in our journal, entitled "The Violence Epidemic in the African American Community".
- In 2018 we developed a fact sheet on gun violence and advocated for the issue on Capitol Hill at our Colloquium in March of this year.
- In July, on behalf of 10 African American professional organizations, NMA spearheaded a letter to the Democratic Presidential candidates outlining gun violence as one of the top issues of concern.
- The NMA has endorsed the House-passed HR 8, which expands background checks and we have also endorsed the fiscal 2020 Labor-HHS-Education spending bill, which would provide \$25 million each to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health to "better understand and prevent injury and death as a result of firearm violence." We have publicly called on the United States Senate take immediate action to bring gun violence prevention bills to the floor for a vote and passage, as well as for President Donald Trump to sign these measures into law.
- The NMA also calls on the federal government to immediately convene a bipartisan commission to evaluate steps to reduce and eventually eliminate gun violence utilizing a public health approach.
- On August 4<sup>th</sup> of this year, NMA Members participated in a CBS Cover Story on gun violence and the public health coalition that formed as a result of the NRA tweet.

## **Other Recommendations**

Public Health

- Establish local **Violence Fatality Review Boards** and the development of local systems that interface with at risk youth who are the victims or perpetrators of violence.
- Establish the **National Violent Death Reporting System of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (NVDS–CDC)** which will identify, qualify and quantify the problem.

#### Deterrence/Investigation

- Have Police Departments to **train officers** in, and promote, community policing.
- Develop **Uniform Standards** requiring police officers to receive implicit bias training, mental health assessment and de-escalation response training.
- Establish Officer **re-certification requirements**
- Create sites for **Safe Fugitive Surrender**.

#### Research Conducted with University Partnerships

- Conduct **National Gun Violence Research Studies** to be funded by the CDC.
- Establish **best practices** in violence prevention, which can be evaluated and reproduced, with testable methods and solutions to treat and prevent violence.

#### Programming

- Employ **Multidisciplinary Services/Access** utilizing Community Partnerships, Community Building Strategies (\*\*Interrupter Model) and Community Stabilization Programs with an acute and sustained approach to Wrap Around Services.
- Promote **Equitable Access** to Economics, Education, Housing, Healthcare, Mental Health, Social Services & Criminal Justice
- Deploy an **Interrupter's Model** which integrates workers who are community based and trained to identify persons or situations that pose a risk for violence in the community and act to utilize systems in place to break the cycle of violence.
- Promote **'healthy community' initiatives**, i.e. community gardens, safe spaces to exercise, community education programs, safe affordable childcare and senior care options. Aggressive screening for lead toxicity with early intervention in high-risk communities.

#### Partnerships/Collaboration

- Establish an **extensive network** with coordination across disciplines, comprised of community-based organizations, faith-based organizations and public institutions such as law enforcement departments, public health departments, academic institutions, hospitals and public schools.  
prosecute, if indicated, all officer involved misconduct and fatal shootings.

- **Documentation:** Physicians to routinely screen patients for any history of interactions with police, the nature of these interactions and any physical or mental symptoms that are a result of these interactions. These histories and any physical exam findings to be documented in the patient's record.
- Establish a **Police Registry**, which lists law enforcement agents that are fired from any police department due to misconduct, insubordination, or knowingly falsifying an application to a police department and is designed to prevent disqualified officers from moving from one department to another.

### Investment

- In addition to investment in the above listed recommendations, **grant and local/federal funds** will be needed for programming aimed at public education on the risk factors for violence and violence prevention strategies.

### Accountability Standards

- **Transparency:** Endorse and support the use of both body cams and dashboard cams.
- **Oversight:** Police and citizen review boards to address police officer misconduct and complaints against officers. Establish a Police Registry, which lists law enforcement agents that are fired from any police department due to misconduct, insubordination or knowingly falsifying an application to a police department. This registry is designed to prevent unqualified officers from moving from one department to another.
- **Impartiality:** Support and advocate for local municipalities, state and federal mandates that require special prosecutors be assigned to review and

### About the National Medical Association

The National Medical Association (NMA) is the nation's oldest and largest organization representing the collective voice of more than 50,000 African American physicians and health professionals in the United States, and the patients they serve. Established in 1895, the NMA is the leading force for parity and justice in medicine and the elimination of disparities in health. NMA is committed to improving the quality of health among minorities and disadvantaged people through its membership, professional development, community health education, advocacy, research and partnerships with federal and private agencies. Throughout its history the National Medical Association has focused primarily on health issues related to African Americans and medically underserved populations; however, its principles, goals, initiatives and philosophy encompass all ethnic groups.

