

Four Recommendations to Better Understand and Address Current Gun Violence Patterns in Seattle

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Four Recommendations to Better Understand and Address Current Gun Violence Patterns in Seattle

Report Highlights

Background

Gun violence in Seattle has increased significantly in the past decade, including a sustained post-pandemic increase in shootings. Between 2020 and 2024, shots fired increased 71 percent; non-fatal shootings increased 58 percent; and fatal shootings increased 23 percent. Therefore, learning more about the current patterns in gun violence in Seattle can help the City of Seattle (City) and the Seattle City Council understand whether City-funded interventions are aligned with our gun violence problems.

What We Found

We found that the City does not currently have a mechanism for systematic reporting on gun violence patterns to City departments, elected officials, and community stakeholders, and the City does not currently have access to other data and analyses (e.g., public health data) that could be helpful for understanding more about gun violence. The City does not routinely engage in the types of problem analyses that lay the foundation for directed, effective strategies, nor does it routinely or systematically engage other City departments, other government entities, and community partners in an “all-hands-on-deck” approach to addressing gun violence.

Recommendations

Our audit describes two approaches for potentially improving the City’s approach to addressing gun violence: 1.) Use a systematic framework for reporting gun violence patterns, and 2.) Use problem analysis and an “all-hands-on-deck” approach to address gun violence. Our report offers four related recommendations as well as an item for City Council consideration related to Seattle Police Department (SPD) investigations.

Mayor’s Office Response

The Mayor’s Office generally concurred with the audit recommendations (see Appendix A).



WHY WE DID THIS AUDIT

This audit regarding current patterns of gun violence in Seattle grew out of a request by Mayor Bruce Harrell and Seattle City Council President Sara Nelson. We hope this audit will serve as a first step to helping the City ensure that its efforts to address gun violence are effective.

HOW WE DID THIS AUDIT

The scope of the audit was focused on recent patterns in gun violence. To conduct this audit, we interviewed officials from City departments, federal agencies, and other jurisdictions. We reviewed research and gathered evidence on best practices, and we received free technical assistance on this audit from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs Violent Crime Reduction Roadmap program provided by the [Police Executive Research Forum](#) (PERF).

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INTRODUCTION

Audit Overview

This audit regarding current patterns of gun violence in Seattle grew out of a request by Mayor Bruce Harrell and Seattle City Council President Sara Nelson.¹ Gun violence in Seattle has increased significantly in the past decade. Therefore, learning more about the current gun violence patterns in Seattle can help the City of Seattle (City) and City Council understand whether City-funded interventions are aligned with our gun violence problems. We hope this audit will serve **as a first step** to helping the City ensure that its efforts to address gun violence are effective. See Exhibit 1 for a potential five-step framework the City could use to ensure its efforts to reduce gun violence are effective.

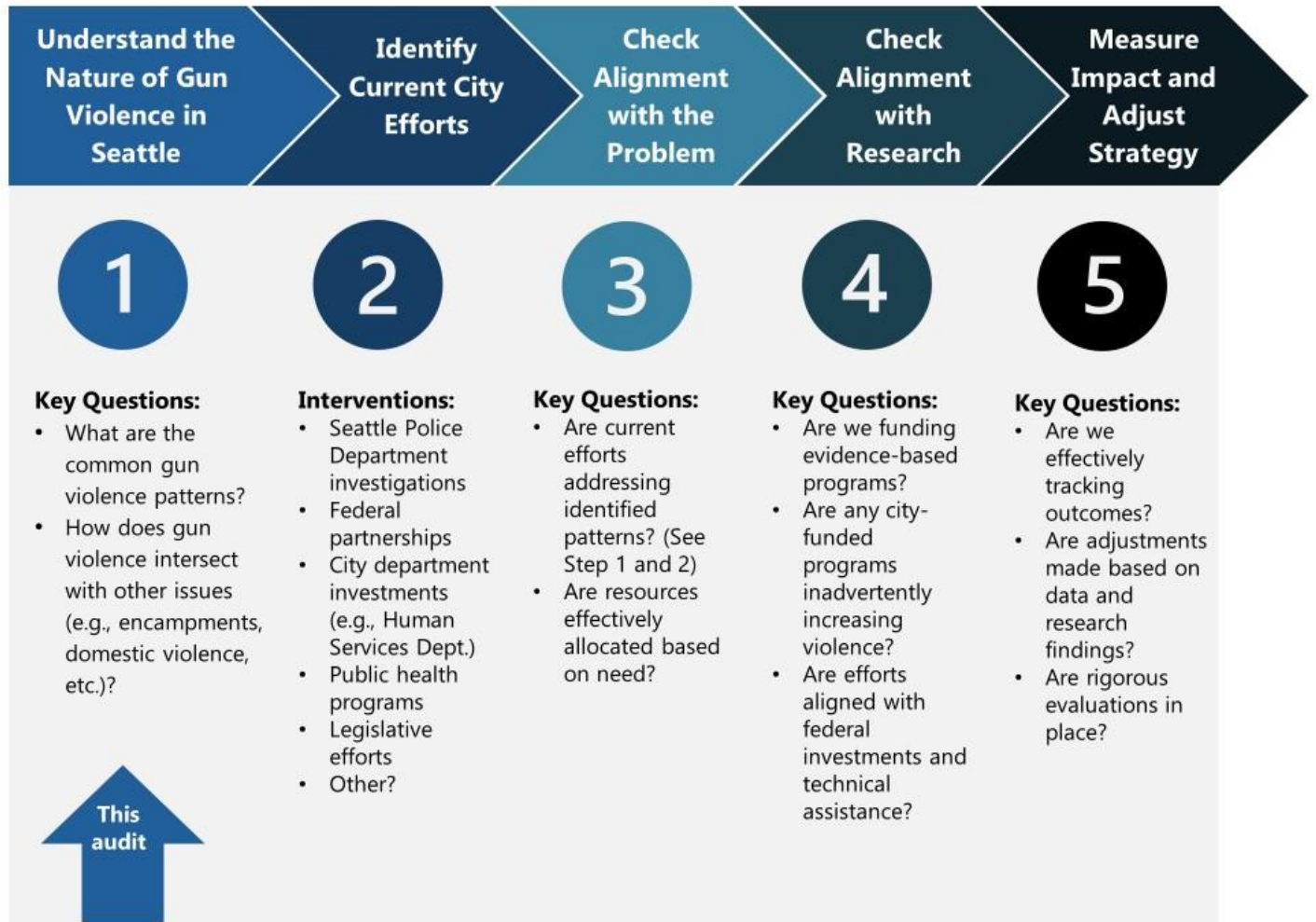
Our audit describes two ways for potentially improving the City's approach to addressing gun violence: 1.) Use a systematic framework for reporting gun violence patterns, and 2.) Use problem analysis and an "all-hands-on-deck" approach to address gun violence. Our report offers four related recommendations as well as an item for City Council consideration related to Seattle Police Department (SPD) investigations.

We received free technical assistance on this audit from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs Violent Crime Reduction Roadmap program provided by the [Police Executive Research Forum](#) (PERF). We would especially like to acknowledge Dr. Lexi Gill of the University of South Florida for her work on this audit on behalf of PERF.

The Mayor's Office, SPD, the Human Services Department, the Community Assisted Response and Engagement (CARE) Department, and the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office reviewed and provided input on this report. The Mayor's Office responses to the report are included in Appendix A.

¹ This audit request grew out of a [January 8, 2024 audit request from Mayor Bruce Harrell and Seattle City Council President Sara Nelson](#) that asked our office to update our [2012 assessment of crime prevention programs funded by the City](#), including programs operated by the City and those run by community-based nonprofit organizations. Like the 2012 assessment, the Mayor and Council President asked our office to identify the evidence-based programs, those with no evidence of effectiveness, those that may be promising, and those that may cause harm. In [April 2024, the Mayor's Office requested that our crime prevention audit be put on hold](#) "because HSD [the Human Services Department] is preparing to issue a new round of RFPs [requests for proposals] that will result in new funding opportunities." The Mayor's Office felt that "assessing these programs in the context of the RFP responses seems more prudent." [On July 24, 2024, at the request of Seattle City Council President Sara Nelson](#), our office initiated this audit on the nature of the current gun violence problem in Seattle. On [October 7, 2024](#) Seattle City Council President Sara Nelson requested that original audit of crime prevention programs be restarted.

Exhibit 1: Five steps the City could take to ensure its gun violence investments are effective



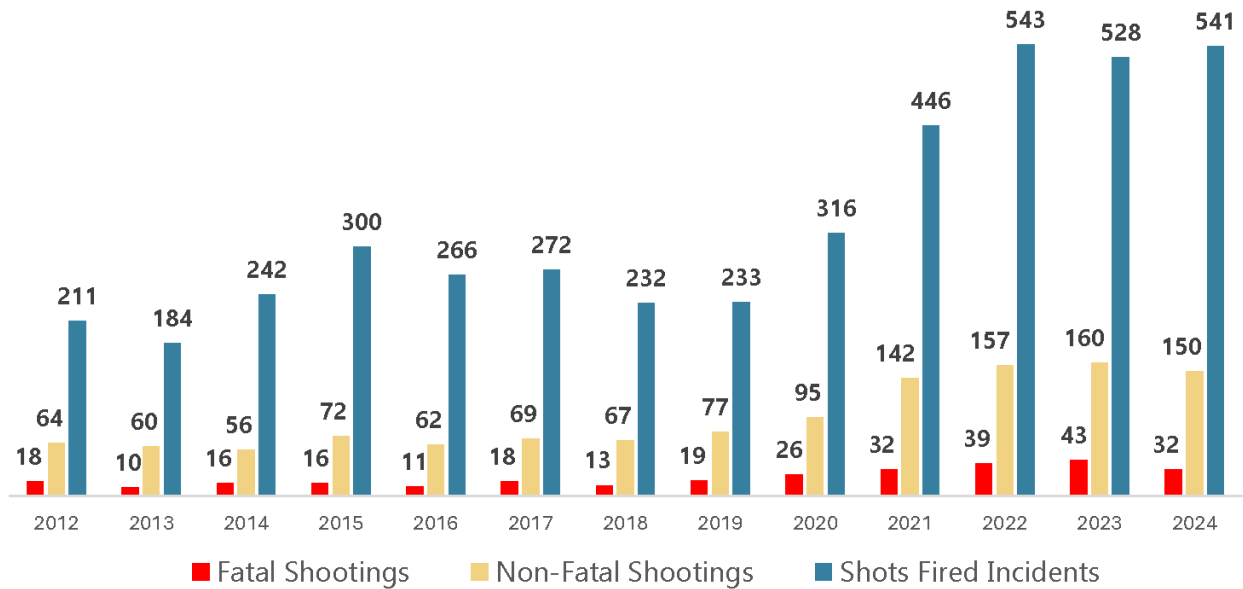
Source: Office of City Auditor

Gun Violence in Seattle

Gun violence in Seattle has risen significantly in the last decade, as shown in Exhibit 2 below. According to SPD data, shots fired incidents rose 194 percent between 2013 and 2024 (184 to 541). In that same timeframe, shootings with non-fatal injuries were up 150 percent (60 to 150) and fatal shootings were up 220 percent (10 to 32). Between 2023 and 2024, fatal shootings fell 26 percent (43 to 32) and non-fatal-injury shootings fell 6 percent (160 to 150), while shots fired incidents were up 3 percent (528 to 541).

Exhibit 2 below provides a visual representation of the sustained post-pandemic increase in shootings. Between 2020 and 2024, shots fired increased 71 percent; non-fatal shootings increased 58 percent; and fatal shootings increased 23 percent.

Exhibit 2: Shootings in Seattle have risen significantly over the last decade



Source: Seattle Police Department Public Crime Dashboard (Note: Counts reflect the number of gun violence incidents as reported to police, not the number of victims.)

In [July 2024](#) and in [January 2025](#), the Seattle Times reported on the increase of fatal shootings among youth in King County, including Seattle. According to King County data, there were 56 gunshot wound victims (fatal and non-fatal) under the age of 18 in Seattle from 2021 through July 2024.²

Seattle has experienced a disproportionate amount of gun violence in the region. In 2023, the gun violence rate was 1.25 per 1,000 individuals in Seattle, compared with 1.01 per 1,000 individuals in King County.³

Gun homicides are also up nationally in recent years, although at lower rates than in Seattle. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, gun homicides in the U.S. rose 60 percent from 2013 to 2023, including a 35 percent spike between 2019 and 2020. The number of such deaths has fallen nationally recently, decreasing 6 percent from 2021 to 2022 and 9 percent from 2022 to 2023. In addition, several of the jurisdictions highlighted in this report,

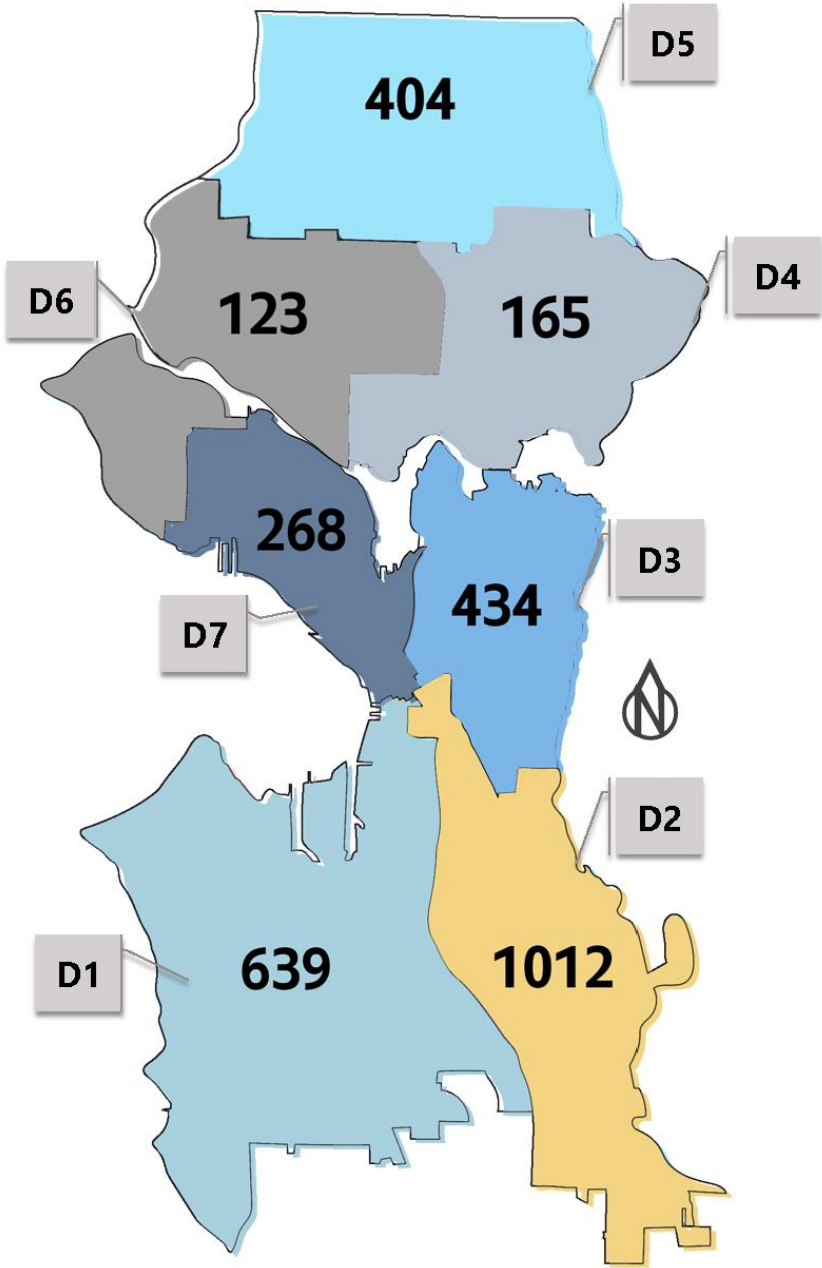
² See this [2024 landscape analysis of gun violence in Seattle](#) prepared by the Police Executive Research Forum and the King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office.

³ See source in footnote 2 above.

including Baltimore and Indianapolis, have seen reductions in gun violence since 2021 when they began implementing comprehensive evidence-based strategies to address gun violence.

Gun offenses are unevenly distributed in Seattle, with 33.2 percent (1,012) of gun offenses between 2021 and 2023 in City Council District 2, encompassing southeast Seattle (see Exhibit 3 below).

Exhibit 3: Gun offenses from January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2023, by City Council District



Data Source: King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office
Image Source: Office of City Auditor

**U.S. Department of Justice
Violent Crime Reduction**

For this audit, we requested and received free technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs (OJP), which, in December 2023, launched the Violent Crime Reduction Roadmap (see Exhibit 4) as “a one-stop-shop to assist local jurisdictions in developing, implementing, and evaluating the right set of strategies to prevent, intervene in, and respond to acts of community gun violence.”

Exhibit 4: U.S. Department of Justice Violent Crime Reduction Roadmap



Source: U.S. Department of Justice

OJP offers free technical assistance for communities on how to use the Roadmap strategies; this technical assistance is provided by the [Police Executive Research Forum](#) (PERF). Their Roadmap is organized around 10 essential actions (pictured in Exhibit 4) to reduce community gun violence identified by the nonprofit [Council on Criminal Justice](#).

Before our audit, the City had not been following the Violent Crime Reduction Roadmap nor using free technical assistance from OJP and PERF. Through our technical assistance from PERF, we worked to identify leading practices from other jurisdictions for tracking patterns in gun violence. This included leading practices in communicating gun violence patterns to City leaders who can track outcomes of existing programs and who can direct City resources, including non-police resources,⁴ toward gun violence prevention efforts.

Actionable Steps for the City

We also worked to identify any potential actionable steps for the City based on current patterns in gun violence. For example, early on in our audit, we determined that the Seattle Police Department (SPD), the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office (KCPAO), and Seattle Parks and Recreation each track data on gun violence in Seattle parks. There is agreement from these departments that a subset of Seattle parks experience high concentrations of gun violence. This data could be helpful for City officials for directing limited resources to physical improvements that could deter gun violence, such as improved access control (e.g., gates) and improved lighting. However, these data as they are currently collected vary in terms of types of gun violence, reporting period, and park names/locations. Therefore, as part of our audit, we worked with SPD, KCPAO, and Parks to develop a consensus dataset for concentrations of gun violence in Seattle parks that could be useful for prioritizing safety improvements (see [this link](#) for the custom report created by SPD for this audit, part of which appears in Exhibit 7 later in this report).

Our office has also conducted other audits on City efforts related to violent crime—see Appendix C for more information, including the status of recommendations from those audits.

⁴ For example, our [July 9, 2024 audit on places in Seattle where overdoses and crimes are concentrated](#) described four types of evidence-based strategies for place-based crime prevention: 1. increase guardianship, 2. change the physical environment, 3. change/enforce rules and policies, and 4. build capacity for community problem-solving.

USE A SYSTEMATIC FRAMEWORK FOR REPORTING GUN VIOLENCE PATTERNS

Section Summary

Currently, the Seattle Police Department (SPD) tracks and analyzes multiple gun violence patterns to support its investigations, and SPD provides additional reports on gun violence patterns based on requests. SPD has the capacity to perform sophisticated diagnostic and geospatial analyses related to gun violence in Seattle (see Exhibit 4 for examples). However, the City does not currently have a mechanism for systematic reporting on gun violence patterns (including public health data) to other City departments, elected officials, and community stakeholders. Narrow and irregular reporting on gun violence can impede opportunities for improved problem-solving and greater accountability. Further, the City does not currently have access to other data and analyses (e.g., public health data) that could be helpful for understanding more about gun violence.

The City should look to examples from other jurisdictions to become more systematic in its reporting on gun violence patterns. In addition, the City could continue to receive ongoing technical assistance from U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs (OJP) and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) to build its reporting on gun violence patterns. We recommend that the City develop systematic reporting on gun violence patterns to City departments, elected officials, community stakeholders, and the public. We also recommend that the Mayor's Office provide an update to the City Council on the violence intervention initiative within the City's Community Assisted Response and Engagement (CARE) Department.

The City has the capacity to report on gun violence patterns, but that information is not shared widely or systematically

Existing Data on Gun Violence Patterns

We worked to identify data the City already collects that can help identify patterns in gun violence to inform City programs and policies. Since the scope of the audit was focused on recent patterns in gun violence (i.e., not all crime nor all violent crime, just gun violence), we explored whether City data can identify the following gun violence patterns:

- Are there common patterns in gun violence in Seattle? (e.g., is there a nexus with gangs/groups, encampments, prostitution, domestic violence, drug distribution and use, etc.)
- Are there common patterns among shooting incidents in Seattle? (e.g., proximity to parks or nightclubs, time of day, differences between youth and adults, etc.)
- Are there common patterns among gun violence victims? (e.g., known to the shooter, youth in a group, bystander, etc.)

The Seattle Police Department's (SPD) public [Crime Dashboard](#) includes historical counts of fatal and non-fatal shootings and shots fired incidents that can be viewed geographically. In addition, existing data sources that we identified during our audit along with descriptions and links to datasets (if available) are included in Exhibit 5 below. SPD has two groups that identify patterns on gun violence. SPD's Investigations Bureau reports on all shots fired incidents and uses data from SPD's records management system and detailed reviews of the case files to identify gun violence patterns including many of those listed above (e.g., nexus with domestic violence).

SPD's Performance Analytics and Research section also provides reports on shootings and shots fired that are shared at [SeaStat](#),⁵ an information-sharing forum for SPD and prosecutors that is based on the principles of [Compstat](#). SPD's Performance Analytics and Research section also produces ad hoc reports related to gun violence such as the example in Exhibit 5 below. County-wide quarterly firearm violence reports produced by the King County Prosecuting Attorney (KCPAO) [Crime Strategies Unit](#) are made publicly available on their website.

⁵ Although SPD's Performance Analytics and Research section shares reports on shootings and shots fired at SeaStat meetings, these are not publicly available. The [SeaStat web page](#) contains meeting slides from 2014-2020 only.

Exhibit 5: Existing data on gun violence patterns in Seattle

Data Source Agency/ Organization	Description of Data Collected	How is the Data Used Currently	Links to Data Sample
SPD Investigations and Criminal Intelligence Unit	Shots fired incident data (fatal injury, non-fatal injury, eyewitness, casings, or property damage); data from detailed review of case files.	Data is used within SPD to identify patterns (e.g., robbery nexus, homelessness nexus, domestic violence nexus). Pattern analyses are shared with SPD investigators, other local law enforcement, and prosecutors.	Seattle Shots Fired Trends by Category (2021- July 2024)
SPD Performance Analytics and Research	Shootings (fatal and non-fatal) and shots fired by precinct and micro-community policing plan area; shooting victim demographics.	Data is shared during monthly SeaStat meetings for SPD command staff and prosecutors.	Year to Date Shooting and Shots Fired (January 1 – July 18, 2024)
SPD Performance Analytics and Research	Ad hoc analyses based on requests from SPD command staff, other City departments, and external organizations.	(Use varies by requestor.)	Report on Firearm Violations and Shots Fired on City Parks and/or Community Centers 2019-2024 <i>(requested by City Budget Office/ Innovation and Performance)</i>
King County Prosecuting Attorney (KCPAO) Crime Strategies Unit	Works with all 39 law enforcement agencies in King County to develop quarterly firearm violence reports. Reports include geographic distribution, historical comparisons, and victim demographics.	Data is made publicly available each quarter. Data is also used to inform and assess KCPAO’s prevention programs.	King County Quarterly Firearm Violence Reports: Q1 2024 Q2 2024 Q3 2024 2024 Year End Report

Source: Office of City Auditor analysis; see links within table for relevant reports

Access to Public Health Data

As described above, the City has broad access to data on gun violence patterns through SPD and the KCPAO. We found that the City does not currently have access to evaluation information from the King County Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention.⁶ Further, although the City's Human Services Department (HSD) [indicated to our office in 2022](#) that it was "establishing routine data reviews of Harborview Medical Center gunshot injury information and Seattle Police Department shots fired information to inform HSD's ongoing evaluation of programs that address gun violence," HSD did not provide our office with these data-review reports.

Public health data is critical to fully understanding patterns of gun violence in Seattle. In 2021, King County was named as one of 15 jurisdictions in a federal initiative to prevent and respond to gun crime, with access to federal resources and supports. However, this information and access is not routinely shared with the City. It was beyond the scope of our audit to investigate this communication issue between the City and the agencies that hold this data (e.g., Public Health Seattle and King County, King County Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention). However, the City will have to address the issue of access to public health data, including data from the King County Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention, if it opts to develop more systematic reporting on gun violence patterns.

Other jurisdictions use more systematic approaches to sharing information on gun violence patterns

While we were not able to conduct an exhaustive review of best practices for this audit, our technical assistance providers from PERF offered examples of jurisdictions that are using systematic approaches to sharing information on gun violence patterns, including sharing information with the public to promote evaluation and accountability. The City of Baltimore has developed an approach to identifying gun violence patterns and sharing that information broadly and systematically.

⁶ In 2022, as [part of our recommendation follow-up on our Street Outreach report](#), the City's Human Services Department (HSD) reported to us that it "holds a \$1.5 million contract with Public Health Seattle-King County for the Regional Peacekeepers Collective (RPKC). Some of this funding supports staff who perform ongoing evaluation to assess whether the Public Health approach to reducing gun violence has a measurable impact. In this approach, providers connect gunshot victims with services that support the victim and family with the goal of interrupting cycles of violence. Through RPKC, HSD is supporting rigorous evaluation of a program with a Street Outreach Component." A rigorous evaluation of the RPKC could provide the City with helpful information on gun violence patterns. However, during this audit, HSD management indicated that HSD does not receive gun violence evaluations from Public Health Seattle-King County. HSD indicated that they anticipate that they will receive the final evaluation from King County when it is completed.

Evaluation and Accountability are Central to Baltimore’s Violence Prevention Plan

Baltimore’s homicides declined 23% and non-fatal shootings declined 34% from 2023 to 2024.

In 2020, the Baltimore City Council passed [the Biennial Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan Ordinance](#). Then [Council President \(and now Mayor\) Brandon M. Scott](#), said, “The Baltimore Police Department cannot be expected to reduce crime alone. All of our agencies have a role to play in addressing gun violence.” The ordinance called for the Baltimore Mayor’s Office to publish a biennial violence reduction plan with several city and state agencies. The legislation also required the “comprehensive crime reduction strategy to include an analysis of criminal justice data, an assessment of holistic, non-policing efforts aimed at crime reduction, and the establishment of goals, priorities, and standards for crime reduction in Baltimore.”

Baltimore’s work on violence prevention is led by the [Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement \(MONSE\)](#). MONSE is responsible for overseeing Baltimore’s violence prevention plan. The [plan](#), originally developed in [2021](#), is based on four “pillars”:

- Public health approach to violence
- Youth justice and violence reduction
- Community engagement and interagency collaboration
- Evaluation and accountability

Since releasing the violence prevention plan in 2021, Baltimore has seen declines in fatal and non-fatal shootings. Between 2023 and 2024, homicides and non-fatal shootings fell 23 percent and 34 percent, respectively.

In addition, [Baltimore’s Public Safety Accountability Dashboard](#)—which notes that it is designed for “transparency” and to “allow the public to hold agencies accountable”—includes historical data on crimes, including homicides and non-fatal shootings as well as data on arrests, convictions, and demographics. Baltimore’s MONSE website (see Exhibit 6 below) also contains “both regular reporting and special reports related to the agency’s charge to implement Baltimore’s all-hands-on-deck public safety strategy.” This currently includes three rigorous research evaluations conducted by researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and Johns Hopkins University.

Exhibit 6: Examples of publicly available gun violence data in other cities



Indianapolis

Baltimore

Portland

The **City of Indianapolis** conducted a rigorous [Gun Violence Problem Analysis](#) and identified [government costs](#) associated with each gun homicide and injury shooting.

The **City of Portland's** interactive [Gun Violence Trends Report](#) allows the public to track progress with gun violence case closures.

The **City of Baltimore** shares regular progress reports and rigorous [evaluation reports](#).

Source: Office of City Auditor

As of January 2025, Portland's Gun Violence Trends Report showed a 35% decrease in total shooting incidents in the previous 12 months.

In July 2022, the Mayor of Portland, Oregon [declared a state of emergency](#) to address rising gun violence in the city, and the City of Portland invested in "[Portland Ceasefire](#)," an evidence-based strategy known as focused deterrence.⁷ Portland Ceasefire provides [monthly public updates](#) on its referral data. The Portland Police Bureau launched an interactive public-facing [Gun Violence Trends Report](#). Data as of January 31, 2025, showed a 35 percent decrease in total shooting incidents in the previous 12 months as compared with February 2021 to January 2024.

A large body of research evidence shows that violence disproportionately concentrates among small numbers of individuals, groups, and locations at the highest risk for violence (see for example (Abt & Hahn, 2024). Action 2 of DOJ's Violent Crime Reduction Roadmap (referenced earlier in this report) states that jurisdictions should identify the key people and places driving violence. Jurisdictions can get training and assistance from DOJ to conduct such analyses and then create plans to curb violence.⁸

In addition, four cities, [Washington D.C.](#), [Austin, Texas](#), [Green Bay, Wisconsin](#), and [Indianapolis](#), have recently worked with [the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform \(NICJR\)](#) to conduct a Gun Violence Problem Analysis, a research-based methodology to identify the specific nature of gun violence in the jurisdiction and the unique characteristics of groups and individuals at highest risk of being involved in gun violence. In addition, [Indianapolis](#) is one of 27 jurisdictions that [has worked with NICJR](#) to identify the specific governmental costs associated with each gun homicide and injury shooting, including crime scene response, hospitalization and rehabilitation, criminal justice, incarceration, victim support, and lost tax revenue. Just one year after Indianapolis implemented its gun violence reduction strategy, it [reported](#) achieving a 16 percent reduction in homicides and a 14 percent reduction in non-fatal shootings, representing the city's largest year-over-year reduction in 20 years.

⁷ Focused deterrence is an evidence-based strategy for reducing violent crime, used also in Baltimore and numerous other cities. Our [2015 Street Outreach audit](#) noted that the City of Seattle does not use a focused deterrence approach to address violent crime and victimization, and that is still the case today.

⁸ As previously mentioned, as part of our audit we requested and received technical assistance from this Department of Justice resource. This technical assistance included the development of an [October 2024 Gun Violence Landscape analysis](#). This report assesses gun violence trends in Seattle and compares these trends to King County overall and other cities in King County. Data and supplementary analyses used to support this report were provided by the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office. Ongoing federal technical assistance is subject to availability of federal funding.

Recommendation 1

The City of Seattle should develop systematic reporting on gun violence patterns to City departments, other government agencies, elected officials, and the public/community stakeholders. The U.S. Department of Justice (through the Office of Justice Programs and the Police Executive Research Forum) is willing, as federal funding permits, to continue to provide technical assistance to Seattle to address this recommendation.

The City's CARE Department could be a convener for systematic information-sharing on gun violence patterns in Seattle

The City of Seattle established the City's [Community Assisted Response and Engagement \(CARE\) Department](#) in October 2023. According to CARE's website, its mission is to "improve public safety, by unifying and aligning the City's community-focused public safety investments and services, to resolve low-risk calls for behavioral health matters through diversified responses that are evidence-based, effective, innovative and compassionate."

In addition, the [ordinance](#) that established CARE called for the department to "create a new initiative to integrate the City's violence intervention programs, using research and evidence-based strategies to reduce violence, including identifying specific and measurable outcomes. This initiative will focus initially on: (a) gun violence prevention interventions; (b) community-based intervention programs, including violence interrupters; (c) youth-focused programs; and use evidence-based public safety strategies to measure program success and develop future solutions."

CARE Department management indicated that work on this new initiative has not yet begun. Given CARE's mission, CARE may be positioned to help convene City departments and stakeholders involved with gun violence prevention and response and to help disseminate systematic reporting on gun violence patterns that we call for in Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 2

The Mayor's Office should provide an update to the Seattle City Council on the Community Assisted Response and Engagement (CARE) Department's ordinance-mandated new initiative to integrate the City's violence intervention programs. This should include the feasibility of CARE to convene City departments and partners involved with violence prevention and response and to help disseminate systematic reporting on gun violence patterns.

USE PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND AN “ALL-HANDS-ON-DECK” APPROACH TO ADDRESS GUN VIOLENCE

Section Summary

The City of Seattle does not routinely engage in the types of problem analyses that identify “key people, places, and behaviors most likely to be involved in violence” that provides the foundation for directed, effective gun violence strategies. In addition, the City does not routinely or systematically engage other City departments, other government entities, and community partners in an “all-hands-on-deck” approach to addressing gun violence. We present examples of other jurisdictions that use these problem analyses and a whole of government approach to address gun violence. We also present some opportunities for Seattle to use problem analysis and an all-hands-on-deck approach to addressing gun violence based on datasets gathered for this audit.

We recommend that to address gun violence the City improve its capacity for problem analysis and develop a framework for regular systematic coordination among City departments, other government entities, and community organizations.

The City of Seattle does not routinely use problem analysis to address gun violence

Problem analysis is the process of conducting in-depth, systematic analysis and assessment of crime problems at the local level. An [October 2024 report](#) on community violence problem analysis from the Violence Reduction Center (VRC) at the University of Maryland identified problem analyses including homicide reviews and place network investigations as “instrumental in directing local attention, energy, and resources towards the anti-violence strategies with the strongest likelihood of success” (Abt & Hahn, 2024). Examples of these analyses from jurisdictions around the country are included in the VRC report.

For example, the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission (MHRC) was found in a rigorous [impact evaluation](#) to be associated with a 52 percent decrease in the monthly count of homicides over an eight-year period. The MHRC was established to “support innovative homicide prevention and intervention strategies” using strategic

problem analysis and strategically focusing “limited enforcement and intervention activities on identifiable risks such as violent crime hot spot areas, highly active violent offenders, and repeat victims.”

The MHRC is a multi-tiered strategy with four levels:

- **Level 1** – real-time response by the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD), also a social service agency provides crisis intervention and case management services, mentoring and emotional support, and home-based health care to victims’ families.
- **Level 2** – monthly detailed reviews of each homicide by MPD units, local institutions (e.g., Milwaukee Housing Authority, Milwaukee Public Schools, etc.), prosecutors, corrections, and federal partners (e.g., Milwaukee High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area [HIDTA]; Drug Enforcement Agency [DEA]; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives [ATF], etc.). Official data are supplemented with knowledge from the line-level law enforcement about the circumstances of the homicide, and the relationships among victims and offenders.
- **Level 3** – reviews of closed cases with a broad array of public health, social services provider agencies, community organizations, faith-based organizations, and City agencies including the Milwaukee Mayor’s Office, Public Health, and the Department of Neighborhoods. This review broadens the understanding of the homicide beyond the Level 2 information to include community-level contributing factors and to identify community interventions that may be appropriate.
- **Level 4** – semi-annual review open to all interested members of the community as well as Level 2 and 3 participants. This includes discussion of aggregate district-level information on victims and suspects, the known circumstances of incidents, and progress of violence prevention efforts. Community members provide feedback on interventions and policy recommendations.

Monthly homicide counts fell 52% in Milwaukee over eight years through its Homicide Review Commission, which includes local, state, and federal agencies and a broad array of community partners.

The [evaluation](#) of the MHRC also found that the recommendations from Milwaukee’s homicide reviews “better positioned criminal justice, social service, and community-based organizations to address high-risk places and high-risk people central to recurring homicide problems” (Azrael, Braga, & O'Brien, 2013). Jurisdictions including Boston, Baltimore, Minneapolis, and Stockton, California have used homicide reviews to inform the development of their violence prevention plans. We were not able to identify any process or practice in Seattle similar to a homicide review commission.

Further, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health has used the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission as a model for a framework they developed called [Violence Reduction Councils \(VRCs\)](#).

According to Johns Hopkins, jurisdictions that have adopted the VRC infrastructure “have improved and strengthened partnerships and increased the capacity of participating systems, agencies and individuals to identify systematic opportunities for prevention to build and sustain positive change reducing violence.” Researchers from Johns Hopkins have offered to provide free technical assistance to the City of Seattle to help understand and implement this violence reduction coordination framework.

A Place Network Investigation in Las Vegas reduced gun-related offenses by 39% in one year.

An emerging type of problem analysis that can be applied to gun violence is the place network investigation (PNI). [A 2018 implementation of PNI in Las Vegas reduced gun-related offenses at the targeted location by 39 percent in one year](#) (from 23 offenses to 14). PNI involves identifying locations consistently linked to criminal activity, including where the crime occurs as well as places where offenders routinely meet or use the locations for staging or supplying. Those locations are shared with a PNI Investigative Board consisting of city departments and community organizations that can prioritize city resources to try to “dismantle” this network. They can work to do so in a variety of ways, such as using legal or regulatory tactics (like revoking licenses or requiring physical changes to buildings) or requiring new employee training or management practices (Herold, Engel, Corsaro, & Clouse, 2020).

Seattle Has Not Systematically Implemented Problem-Oriented Policing to Address Gun Violence

Problem analyses like homicide reviews have evolved from problem-oriented policing and evidence-based, public health problem-solving frameworks. Decades of research show strong and consistent evidence that [problem-oriented-policing \(POP\)](#) is an effective strategy for reducing crime and disorder. POP requires police to use problem-solving to address chronic problems, rather than using traditional reactive efforts. POP interventions commonly use the SARA (scanning, analysis, response, assessment) model to identify problems, carefully analyze the conditions contributing to the problem, develop a tailored response to target these underlying factors, and evaluate outcome effectiveness. POP has been effectively used to address a range of crime types, including violent crimes and property crime.⁹

Although POP has existed since the 1980s, the City has not systematically implemented it. In fact, the City’s lack of experience with POP was seen as a limiting factor in a federally funded pilot project designed to address two downtown Seattle crime hot spots (Gill, et al., 2018). Our [2023 audit on organized retail crime in Seattle](#) recommended that the City consider using free technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Justice to begin to apply POP techniques

⁹ A 2020 meta-analysis of 34 studies of POP found a statistically significant 34 percent reduction in crime and disorder in the POP treatment areas compared to the control sites (Hickle, Weisburd, Telep, & Peterson, 2020).

to address known organized retail crime fencing operations.¹⁰ These same resources could be used to help the City apply POP techniques to address gun violence. Further, as we described in our [2024 audit on places in Seattle where overdoses and crimes are concentrated](#), the City has not routinely used an evidence-based public health problem-solving framework to address places where crime is concentrated.

In contrast, Cincinnati has codified its requirement that the Cincinnati Police Department use problem-oriented policing in its police procedures manual. This grew out of Cincinnati's 2002 [Collaborative Agreement](#) in which the City and police union entered into the agreement to settle litigation related to use of force. The agreement sets forth that the City "shall adopt problem solving as the principal strategy for addressing crime and disorder problems." It also calls on the City to "develop and implement a plan to coordinate the City's activities so that multi-agency problem solving with community members becomes a standard practice." It requires the parties to conduct community problem-oriented policing (CPOP) training "for community groups, jointly promote CPOP, and implement said CPOP training" and requires that problem solving "continue to be emphasized" in police department trainings. Cincinnati officials indicated that currently community organizations that receive City funding are required to complete problem-solving training.¹¹

Recommendation 3

The City of Seattle should improve its capacity for problem analysis to address gun violence, including 1.) implementing problem-oriented policing, 2.) exploring the use of problem analyses such as homicide reviews and place network investigations, and 3.) requiring organizations that receive City funding to address gun violence to complete evidence-based problem-solving training.

¹⁰ For example, the U.S. Department of Justice's [Community Oriented Policing Services \(COPS\) Office funds a clearinghouse of information](#) on POP. In addition, the Bureau of Justice Assistance offers [consultation and short-term technical assistance](#) to local governments and law enforcement agencies that includes implementing evidence-based programs, such as POP.

¹¹ For example, the [Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area](#) offers free training for local government departments, service providers, and community organizations in the [Strategic Prevention Framework, an evidence-based problem-solving framework developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#).

Data suggest that the City is missing opportunities to apply multi-departmental collaborative problem-solving to address gun violence

The previous examples of Milwaukee's Homicide Review Commission and Las Vegas' place network evaluation highlight how other jurisdictions involve other City departments, other local institutions (e.g., school district), state and local agencies, and community organizations in an all-hands-on-deck approach to addressing gun violence.

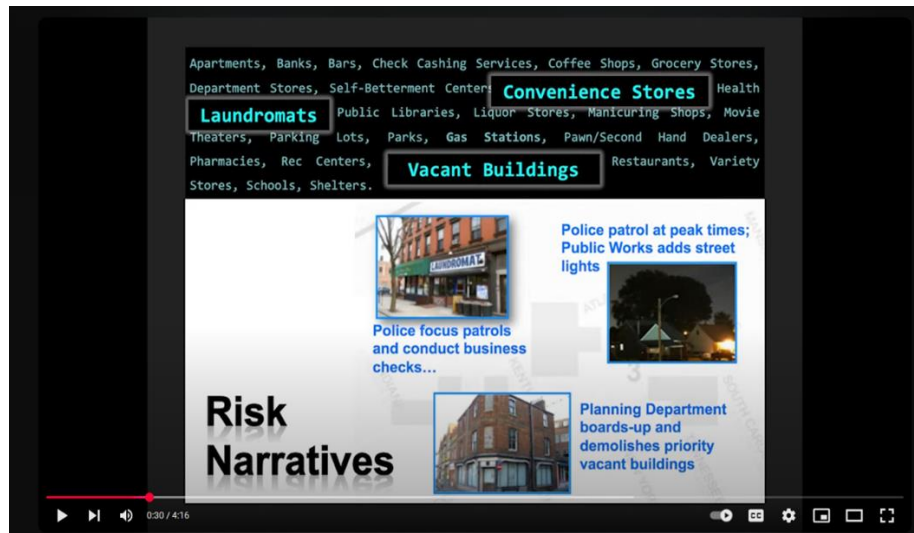
[Baltimore City's Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan](#), "recognizes that every agency, institution, and organization that interfaces with Baltimoreans has a role to play in preventing violence in our communities." Baltimore's Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE) established and implemented an interagency coordination infrastructure in partnership with the city's Chief Administrative Officer and fellow city agencies including the Department of Public Works, Mayor's Office of African American Male Engagement, Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success, Baltimore Police Department, Baltimore Fire Department, the Department of Housing and Community Development, the State's Attorney's Office, and the Baltimore County Health Department.¹²

Another example is [Newark, New Jersey's Public Safety Collaborative](#) which states that,

"Public safety efforts need to be data-driven and evidence-based. While the City of Newark and its police department (NPD) has the technological capacity for extensive data collection and management, there needs to be an equally robust framework for collaborative problem-solving and community engagement. There is also a need to coordinate multiple resources in efficient and effective ways. Newark's wealth of 'big data' requires a structured and repeatable process for its analysis and review in order to become actionable by a variety of municipal departments and their community partners. This needs to be done in a measured and transparent way."

¹² See pp. 19-20 of [Baltimore's 2024 Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan Update](#).

This four-minute video from the Newark Public Safety Collaborative describes their collaborative model for using data to engage City departments and community partners to address places where shootings are most likely to occur.



Source: Newark Public Safety Collaborative, https://youtu.be/-az_Q8shgX0

During this audit, we reviewed existing data on gun violence patterns that is produced by SPD’s Investigations Bureau and the King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office (KCPAO) Crime Strategies Unit. We also received new analyses (citywide shots fired and shots fired in parks) of gun violence patterns from SPD’s Performance Analytics and Research section and a Seattle gun violence landscape analysis from the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), which provides technical assistance on behalf of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

These datasets point to current gun violence patterns in Seattle that might benefit from a collaborative problem-solving approach involving other City departments, local/state/federal agencies, and community partners. A systematic problem analysis process (e.g., Milwaukee’s homicide review) would likely reveal greater potential areas for collaboration to address Seattle’s current gun violence patterns. Below, we offer a few potential examples.

Gun Violence in Seattle Parks

The KCPAO Crime Strategies Unit indicated that there are some variations in the types of places where gun violence is concentrated in Seattle compared with other King County cities. For example, in south King County, shootings concentrate around apartment complexes, and in Seattle shootings concentrate in and around parks and community centers. However, at the time of our audit Seattle Parks and Recreation (Parks) did not have a comprehensive list of shootings in Seattle parks. Parks staff maintained a file of shootings based on reports from staff and media. At our request, SPD Performance Analytics and Research created a custom report that identified the count of shots fired and gun violations, subjects of shots fired, and victims of shots fired registered at or within 100 feet of parks between January 2021 and

August 2024. Their report identified 11 parks with a high incidence of shootings and shots fired (see Exhibit 7 below).

Exhibit 7: Seattle Parks with high incidences of shootings and shots fired (January 2021 to August 2024)

Parks	Fatal Shooting	Non-Fatal Shooting	Shots Fired (Eyewitness/Casings/ Property Damage)	Total
Beer Sheva Park	0	3	9	12
Cheasty Greenspace	1	0	10	11
Cal Anderson Park	3	4	2	9
Magnuson Park	0	4	5	9
Alki Beach Park	1	1	5	7
Yesler Terrace Park	0	3	4	7
Hamilton Viewpoint Park	0	2	4	6
Jose Rizal Park	1	1	3	5
Garfield Playfield	0	1	4	5
Powell Barnett Park	0	2	2	4
Stan Sayres Memorial Park	0	3	0	3

Source: Seattle Police Department Performance Analytics and Research

This information could be helpful to the City in focusing limited City resources on the parks with the highest levels of gun violence. There are many proven-effective place-based strategies for reducing violent crime, such as improved lighting and increased access controls that could be effective at these park locations.¹³

Nexus with Homelessness

People experiencing homelessness are at high risk for violent victimization, including fatal and non-fatal shootings (see for example, (Dell, Vaughn, & Salas-Wright, 2023). Data collected for this audit suggest a nexus between homelessness and gun violence in Seattle, though more problem analysis would be needed to understand this relationship more fully and identify strategies that may be effective in addressing it. For example, SPD tracks shooting incidents that occurred in or near a homeless encampment or in which at least one of the involved people (suspect or victim) was identified as unhoused

¹³ For more information on evidence-based strategies to reduce crime at places, see our July 2024 audit [Addressing Places in Seattle Where Overdoses and Crime are Concentrated: An Evidence-Based Approach](#).

at the time of the incident. These monthly averages are presented below in Exhibit 8.

Exhibit 8: Monthly average of shooting incidents with a homelessness nexus

Year	Monthly Average of Shooting Incidents with a Homelessness Nexus
2021	9.4
2022	9.7
2023	5.8
2024 (Jan,1 – July 31, 2024)	4.6

Source: Seattle Police Department Investigations and Criminal Intelligence Unit

Compared with greater King County, Seattle experiences a disproportionate share of gun violence incidents occurring at homeless encampments. An [analysis prepared by PERF and the KCPAO Crime Strategies Unit](#), for January 1, 2021, to September 5, 2024, indicates that of the 150 total gun violence incidents they identified as occurring at homeless encampments county-wide, 89.33 percent (134) occurred in Seattle.

The City of Seattle might have an opportunity to learn in real time from Portland, Oregon, which is also grappling with gun violence affecting people experiencing homelessness. As of January 31, 2025, overall gun violence in Portland fell by 23 percent in the past 12 months compared with February 2023 to January 2024. However, [The Oregonian](#) reported that five of the first 15 homicides in 2024 in Portland had involved a person experiencing homelessness, and the City of Portland was considering tailoring its evidence-based focused-deterrence gun violence strategy, [Portland Ceasefire](#), to meet the specific needs of this population.

Shooting Events Related to Domestic Violence

SPD data show that shots fired with a nexus to domestic violence increased during the pandemic and continue to be elevated. The highest counts were August and November 2023 with eight shooting events related to domestic violence in each of those months. Baltimore’s Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan has sought to integrate intimate partner violence (IPV) prevention with its community violence intervention efforts. Baltimore is piloting an IPV high risk case review process in partnership with the Baltimore Police Department, Corrections, prosecutors, and community providers. A similar high risk case review might be helpful in Seattle given the elevated instances of shooting events related to domestic violence.

Illegal Drugs and Gun Violence in Seattle

Although SPD Investigations Bureau analysts read every case file and speak with investigators, they indicated that it can be difficult to establish a pattern with a nexus in the data between illegal drug distribution and gun violence. Certain cases, however, do show a connection between drug trafficking and gun violence. For example, in [August 2023](#) there was a mass shooting in a Seattle hookah lounge that resulted in three fatalities and six people injured. An [October 2024 federal indictment](#) included one of the men injured in that shooting, who was indicted along with 11 others in connection with a violent drug trafficking ring.

One potential way for the City to gather more information about the nexus between illegal drug distribution and gun violence is for Seattle to investigate fatal overdoses to learn more about Seattle drug trafficking operations. As we reported in [our July 2024 audit on overdoses and crime](#), “The Seattle Police Department does not currently investigate fatal overdoses. Therefore, the City is missing opportunities to gather information about the drug distribution organizations that operate in Seattle’s overdose hot spots.” Other jurisdictions investigate fatal overdoses through multi-agency collaborations with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the U.S. Attorney. The Seattle field offices for both federal partners have offered to support Seattle in these investigations.

Opportunity for Greater Coordination with ATF

Tracing the chain of commerce for firearms that have been recovered by SPD can provide insights on the pathways through which Seattle gun criminals acquire their firearms and can help inform policies and practices to address gun violence. SPD commissioned a [2019 report on firearms](#) recovered by SPD and submitted to the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) for tracing between 2013 and 2018. The report indicated that although SPD policy mandates that all recovered firearms involved in a crime or suspected of involvement in criminal activity must be submitted to the ATF for tracing, only 71.8 percent (2,581) of the total 3,596 gun recoveries during that period were submitted to ATF for tracing. An updated firearms trace report has been commissioned by the City, and it will include new data, including the percentage of firearms submitted by SPD to ATF for tracing.

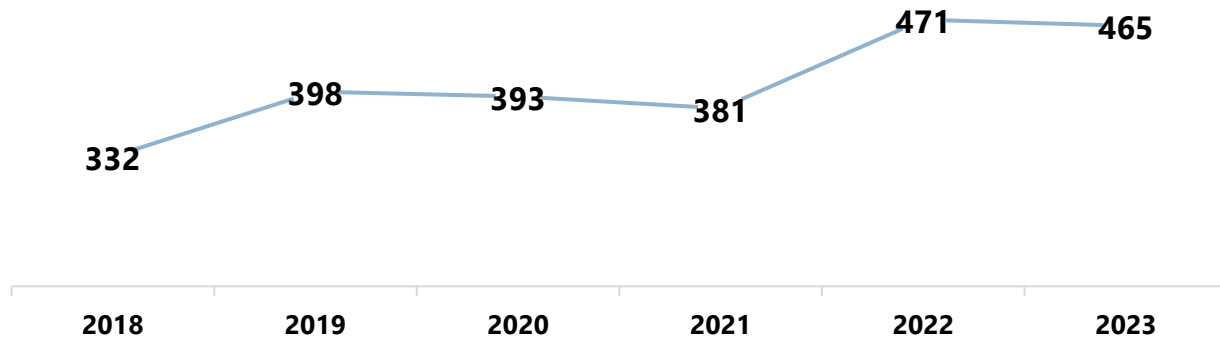


Image of a bullet casing at a crime scene in downtown Seattle.
Source: Seattle Police Department Blotter

The ATF's new Crime Gun Intelligence Center in Seattle will provide an opportunity for more problem-solving between the City and other local jurisdictions.

In addition, in fall 2024, the ATF opened a [new Crime Gun Intelligence Center](#) (CGIC) in downtown Seattle that can provide an opportunity for greater coordination among Seattle, other King County jurisdictions, and the ATF. SPD currently analyzes recovered shell casings in near real time. However, some multi-jurisdiction investigations have been hampered because some jurisdictions in King County did not have access to real-time ballistics analysis. ATF officials indicated that CGIC will provide real-time ballistics analysis for jurisdictions including Kent, Federal Way, and Des Moines. This will help support and speed up multi-jurisdiction investigations. The CGIC includes three intelligence research analysts who can support ballistics analysis and help generate leads for local law enforcement, as well as two task-force officers and a supervisor. ATF officials indicated that addressing stolen firearms will be a focus for them. This could be a timely opportunity for Seattle as SPD data indicates that the number of guns reported or recorded as stolen increased from 2018 to 2023 (see Exhibit 9).

Exhibit 9: Number of stolen guns in Seattle increased from 2018 to 2023



Source: Office of City Auditor analysis of Seattle Police Department data on stolen guns.

Recommendation 4

To address gun violence the City of Seattle should implement a framework for regular systematic coordination among City departments, other government entities, and community organizations.

ITEM FOR CITY COUNCIL CONSIDERATION: IMPROVE SPD INVESTIGATIONS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND ADDRESS GUN VIOLENCE

Section Summary

Information from police investigations is crucial for understanding more about current gun violence patterns in Seattle. Further, effective police investigations of gun violence cases can be an effective strategy for addressing gun violence. [In 2022, Mayor Harrell issued an Executive Order](#) directing SPD to engage national experts in a systemic review of SPD investigations of serious criminal offenses. A [2023 report](#) by the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy assessed the state of SPD's investigative operations. It identified organizational weaknesses and found that SPD's "long-standing practices related to investigations are not well aligned with the research about effective investigations."

During our audit, we encouraged the Executive to brief the City Council on SPD's progress towards addressing the report's recommendations. Seattle Police Chief Shon Barnes provided the [City Council with their first public briefing on this matter on February 25, 2025](#). While we did not assess SPD's progress as part of this audit, given the importance of effective investigations for addressing gun violence, we have included this as an item for City Council consideration.¹⁴

¹⁴ The initial draft of our audit report stated that City Council should consider requesting an update on SPD's progress. We sent our draft audit report to the Mayor's Office for comment in November 2024. Council later received an update from SPD in February 2025. We updated our item for consideration to say that Council should continue to monitor SPD's efforts to improve its investigations.

SPD Investigations Report: Recommendations in eight areas

In June 2023, SPD received a [report on SPD investigations](#) conducted by the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP). The report¹⁵ found that SPD does not follow many best practices for “investigative effectiveness” and that “even if the SPD returns to full personnel capacity, these organizational weaknesses will continue if unattended” (Lum, et al., 2023).

Some of the CEBCP report’s findings include:

“Even if the SPD returns to full personnel capacity, these organizational weaknesses will continue if unattended.”

(Lum, et al., 2023)

- There was a lack of strategic leadership and direction for the SPD’s Investigations Bureau’s body of work and areas of responsibility.
- There was no evidence of standard operating procedures or manuals for investigations.
- Investigative approaches varied significantly across detectives and units, and investigators didn’t know if the approaches they used were the most optimal.
- Supervisors did not have a standard case management tool to assess the performance of their unit and investigators regularly.
- The application, selection, onboarding, and training processes for investigations in SPD were informal, nonstrategic, undocumented, and unstructured.
- SPD had few opportunities for collaboration, teamwork, and strategizing between its Patrol and Investigations bureaus.

The CEBCP report noted that the problems with SPD investigations were not simply a matter of staffing but included longstanding “organizational infrastructure problems that impact the agency’s operational capacity and potentially undermine its public legitimacy.”

Lack of public legitimacy can have an adverse effect on public cooperation with gun violence investigations. [SPD data](#) indicates that from 2021 to 2024, there has been an increase in public unwillingness to cooperate with gun violence cases. SPD shots fired incidents during which officers contacted an uncooperative subject or victim went from a monthly average of 6.9 per in 2021 to 14.4 in 2024.

¹⁵ The [CEBCP report](#) made recommendations in eight areas:

1.) State of Investigations and Agency Context 2.) Organization of Investigations 3.) Selection, Onboarding, and Training 4.) Investigative Process and Workload 5.) Leadership and Supervision 6.) Information Systems for Case Tracking and Management 7.) Investigative Support Services 8.) Investigations and Patrol.

The CEBCP report noted that many of the individuals interviewed for the report “expressed a desire to see the SPD improve internally and in its service to the City of Seattle.” Due to the significant findings in the CEBCP report and the implications for gun violence investigations, we encouraged the Executive to brief the City Council on SPD’s progress towards addressing the report’s recommendations. SPD Chief Shon Barnes provided the City Council with their first [public briefing](#) on this matter on February 25, 2025. Chief Barnes indicated that more work is needed to address the report’s recommendations. Therefore, we offer the following item for City Council consideration.

Item for City Council Consideration

The City Council should continue to monitor the Seattle Police Department’s efforts to address findings from a 2023 report that identified weaknesses in SPD’s investigative operations.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

This audit regarding current patterns of gun violence in Seattle was requested [by Seattle City Council President Sara Nelson in July 2024](#). This audit grew out of a January 2024 request by Mayor Bruce Harrell and Council President Nelson.¹⁶

The scope of the audit was focused on recent patterns in gun violence (i.e., not all crime, nor all violent crime, just gun violence). Our analysis attempted to explore:

- Are there common patterns in gun violence in Seattle? (e.g., is there a nexus with gangs/groups, nexus with encampments, nexus with prostitution, nexus with domestic violence, nexus with drug distribution, nexus with drug use, etc.)
- Are there common patterns among shootings in Seattle? (e.g., proximity to parks, proximity to nightclubs, time of day, are the patterns for youth different from adults, etc.)
- Are there common patterns among gun violence victims? (e.g., known to the shooter, youth in a group, bystander, etc.)

To accomplish the audit's objectives, we performed the following:

- Interviewed officials in the City of Seattle, including officials in the Mayor's Office, Seattle Police Department, and Community Assisted Response and Engagement (CARE) Department
- Interviewed officials from the U.S. Department of Justice, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, and the cities of Baltimore, Cincinnati, and Tucson, Arizona

¹⁶ This audit request grew out of a [January 8, 2024 audit request from Mayor Bruce Harrell and Seattle City Council President Sara Nelson](#) that asked our office to update our [2012 assessment of crime prevention programs funded by the City](#), including programs operated by the City and those run by community-based nonprofit organizations. Like the 2012 assessment, the Mayor and Council President asked our office to identify the evidence-based programs, those with no evidence of effectiveness, those that may be promising, and those that may cause harm. In [April 2024, the Mayor's Office requested that our crime prevention audit be put on hold](#) "because HSD [the Human Services Department] is preparing to issue a new round of RFPs [requests for proposals] that will result in new funding opportunities." The Mayor's Office felt that "assessing these programs in the context of the RFP responses seems more prudent." [On July 24, 2024, at the request of Seattle City Council President Sara Nelson](#), our office initiated this audit on the nature of the current gun violence problem in Seattle. On [October 7, 2024](#) Seattle City Council President Sara Nelson requested that original audit of crime prevention programs be restarted.

- Requested and received technical assistance from the Police Executive Research Forum, including on analyzing existing data of gun violence in King County, researching best practices, and connecting with officials in jurisdictions outside Washington
- Requested data and analyses of gun violence from the Seattle Police Department, Seattle Parks and Recreation Department, Human Services Department, and King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office
- Researched best practices on analyzing gun violence data

As part of this audit, we did not evaluate the current effectiveness of gun violence prevention programs in Seattle.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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APPENDIX A

Mayor's Office Response



City of Seattle

Mayor Bruce Harrell

March 6, 2025

David G. Jones
Office of the City Auditor

Dear City Auditor Jones,

Thank you for the report “Four Recommendations to Better Understand and Address Current Gun Violence Patterns in Seattle” which Council President Nelson and Mayor Harrell requested in January 2024.

The issue of gun violence is critically important. Preventing gun violence is the top priority of our Police Department (SPD) and officers are seizing illegal guns and arresting offenders nearly every day.

Similar to cities like Baltimore, we have taken a holistic approach to addressing public safety and, more specifically, gun violence. Indeed, reducing gun violence and other violent crime is a key component of our [One Seattle Restoration Framework](#) (the “Restoration Framework”).

The *Restoration Framework* affirms that improving public safety involves collaboration across multiple City departments and programs. This includes our investments in community-based interventions, hospital-based support, and school safety measures. Additionally, the *Restoration Framework* establishes key performance indicators to be shared on public dashboards as part of our commitment to transparency and accountability. Our metrics and visualizations will evolve as we learn, iterate, and improve our programs and we are committed to identifying further metrics to help us build meaningful and sustainable solutions to increase collaboration between departments.

As an example of this holistic approach, in areas with high levels of gun violence we are expanding crisis response, mentorship programs, and resource navigation services. These comprehensive services are designed to address every aspect of this complex and challenging issue. At Harborview Medical Center, the City funds hospital-based violence interventions that connect victims and their families with trauma-informed care, financial assistance, housing support, and workforce development. Last year, the program expanded to serve gunshot victims of all ages.

Additionally, the City is working with Seattle Public Schools and King County to implement a three-part strategy focused on school-based safety measures, violence intervention, and law enforcement collaboration, with targeted efforts at 11 high-risk middle and high schools. We know that one way to prevent gun violence is to make sure our children get the strong start they deserve. We begin early in the all-important birth-to-five years through our investments in quality childcare, the home visitation program Nurse Family Partnership, and the Seattle Preschool Program. These efforts have strong research evidence demonstrating that the kids in these programs have lower levels of criminal legal system involvement and better education outcomes.

Moreover, we have strengthened law enforcement efforts to address gun violence hotspots and firearm-related crimes. The Police Department’s Gun Violence Reduction Unit analyzes firearm incidents and utilizes the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network to identify trends and allocate

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resources effectively. SPD is actively engaged in regional task forces to investigate gun trafficking and enforce extreme risk protection orders. We have worked to expand regional collaboration, partnering with federal agencies such as the ATF and FBI on joint investigations, as well as with King County to coordinate gun violence reduction efforts. Later this year, we will release an updated gun trace report on firearm sources, trafficking patterns, and associated crimes.

Lastly, recognizing that gun violence is a regional and national problem, we are advocating for stronger state and federal regulations to restrict the proliferation of dangerous weapons. Seattle plans to lead a coalition to push for changes in state laws, including lifting preemption restrictions, implementing a permit-to-purchase system, and enhancing gun safety requirements. We also advocate for the authority to impose local firearm restrictions in sensitive areas, such as parks, playfields, and community centers. By combining local interventions with regional partnerships and state-level advocacy, Seattle aims to create a safer environment and reduce gun-related harm citywide.

Let me turn now to comments about your specific recommendations.

Recommendation 1 encourages the City to report gun violence patterns publicly. SPD currently maintains a public-facing online dashboard that includes some of the information you suggest should be reported. SPD strives to make its data and analyses as publicly available as possible within a highly regulated and inherently sensitive environment without compromising the integrity of active investigations. Consistent with this recommendation, SPD will further its existing plan to continuously expand and improve its online reporting within legal, ethical, and regulatory restrictions.

Recommendation 2 pertains to the CARE Department. We are prepared to update Council members on the status of the CARE Department enabling ordinance regarding the potential integration of violence intervention programs and improved data collection, sharing, and dissemination.

Recommendation 3 encourages SPD to improve its capacity for problem analysis and problem-oriented policing. SPD currently utilizes these evidence-based approaches and has been developing its analytic capabilities for over a decade. Evidence-based analysis is a priority for Chief Shon Barnes, and continuous improvement – the hallmark of a learning organization – is one of his priorities. SPD provided the additional response below:

“SPD agrees that problem-oriented, evidence-based analysis is critical to effectively and efficiently meeting public safety challenges. That said, current and upcoming work and initiatives bear directly on this recommendation. SPD routinely works with the City Attorney’s Office on a high-utilizer list, monitoring ‘high risk’ individuals who are candidates for Extreme Risk Protection Orders, and engaging with other city stakeholders around civil, regulatory, and CPTED work related to known problem locations. Additionally, SPD was one of the key drivers in assessing the San Francisco DMACC model for addressing quality of life/crime/disorder issues, an approach that is now one fundamental part of the City’s DAT work around 3rd and Pike and 12th and Jackson (a report on that work, by Dr. Jackie Helfgott at Seattle University, will be published shortly). However, SPD also recognizes that Place Network Investigations (PNI), while applicable in many jurisdictions that have clustered gun violence, may not be readily applicable to the type of decentralized gun violence that exists in Seattle.”

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“SPD is energized to move forward and committed to continued and expanded work in this area, operationally and analytically, and appreciates City support in ensuring that it has leading edge tools, training, and staffing to meet these challenges.”

Chief Barnes, having successfully implemented a problem-oriented approach in Madison, will introduce in Seattle his model of [stratified policing](#) to address immediate, short-term, and long-term complex public safety challenges, rooted in evidence-based practice and within a structure of organizational accountability. In addition, the Real Time Crime Center, including recently approved CCTV capabilities, will enable a faster, more efficient, and more precise approach to crime response later this year.

I also want to highlight the Downtown Activation Teams’ (DAT) work since last fall. DAT efforts follow the data by focusing on areas with concentrated criminal activity with significant impacts on the community. DAT is a specific application of place-based problem solving that incorporates an all-of-government approach. DAT has three main strategies: (1) scheduled restoration actions to address visual disorder, cleanliness, and proactive policing, (2) a holistic outreach response to the homeless population with offers of services, (3) and long-term activation to revitalize and support the area. DAT’s work has resulted in significant public safety improvements in the target areas and is the model we will follow going forward.

Recommendation 4 asserts that the City “should implement a framework for regular systematic coordination among City departments, other government entities, and community organizations to address gun violence.” This type of collaboration and coordination was contemplated as part of the *Restoration Framework*. The City has taken the first step towards implementing this recommendation by establishing the multi-department and multi-stakeholder DAT. The City will be further expanding on this approach with the anticipated launch of the One Seattle Restoration Subcabinet. This entity will be responsible for the oversight of the various cross-sector initiatives and investments identified in the Framework, as well as driving an integrated and data-centric strategy to address our most pressing public safety issues, including gun violence.

Finally, the report urges the City Council to invite SPD to update the Council on the 2023 assessments of criminal case investigations. Chief Barnes briefed the Council on Tuesday, February 25, 2025, about the progress made thus far on implementing the recommendations from that assessment. SPD is more than willing to provide further briefings at the Council’s request. (The external subject-matter experts who evaluated SPD’s criminal investigation systems, policies, and practices did so at the Mayor’s direction in Executive Order 2022-05, issued in July 2022. That order is attached and can also be read [here](#).)

In closing, our city government is a learning organization. We strive to do better, improve performance, meet the expectations of the people of Seattle, and do so with integrity, fairness, and justice.

Sincerely,

Natalie Walton-Anderson

Natalie Walton-Anderson
Chief Public Safety Officer
Attachment: Executive Order 2022-05



City of Seattle

Mayor Bruce Harrell

Executive Order 2022-05: Directing the Seattle Police Department to Assess Policies, Protocols, and Practices Related to the Investigation of Criminal Offenses and Implement Necessary Solutions to Advance Justice and Serve the Needs of Crime Survivors.

An Executive Order to implement immediate solutions to address the need for additional investigation by the Seattle Police Department (“SPD” or “Police Department”) of serious criminal offenses, increase the number of detectives assigned to SPD follow-up investigation units by implementing the recently announced recruitment and retention plan, improve the region’s systemic handling of case investigations, especially regarding sexual assault, and to enhance victim care and support services.

WHEREAS, the number of Washington State certified police officers fully trained and available to be deployed by the Seattle Police Department has rapidly declined since 2019, leaving only 954 deployable officers as of May 2022, the lowest number since 1991; and

WHEREAS, beginning in 2020 and continuing today, the Police Department has been compelled to transfer officers from traffic enforcement, follow-up investigation units, and other specialized units to the Patrol Operations Bureau to respond to 911 calls involving life-threatening public safety emergencies and serious crimes in progress; and

WHEREAS, the necessity of transferring officers to 911 response positions has adversely impacted the Police Department’s ability to conduct follow-up investigations of serious criminal offenses; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and the Chief of Police have identified the current number of fully trained and deployable police officers is inadequate to meet the Charter goal of “maintain[ing] adequate police protection in each district of the City,” and on July 13, 2022, announced the implementation of an innovative and comprehensive police officer recruiting and retention plan to increase the number of fully trained and deployable officers to 1,450, a ratio of 1.9 officers per 1,000 residents of Seattle, which is a ratio consistent with the years before 2020; and

WHEREAS, a fully staffed Police Department is critical to the investigation of crimes of violence, including sexually motivated crimes, and efforts to hold people who commit these crimes accountable; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Chief of Police have identified the need for an objective systemic evaluation of the Police Department’s Investigations Bureau, including the Sexual Assault Unit, and the handling of sexual assault investigations;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Bruce A. Harrell, Mayor of Seattle, declare that the lack of an adequate number of fully trained and deployable Seattle police officers puts at risk the peace, safety, and wellbeing of the people of Seattle and those who visit the City, and, in collaboration with Interim Chief of Police Adrian Diaz, order the following actions:

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1. Bolstering Criminal Case Follow-Up Investigations and Victim Care Services

- a. No later than August 31, 2022, the Seattle Police Department will ensure that every reported felony crime of violence with sufficient evidence allowing for a follow-up investigation, including any backlogged sexual assault cases, is assigned to a case detective in sexual assault. The Human Services Department is piloting an effort to ensure domestic violence cases not assigned for further investigation will be offered victim support services.
- b. The Mayor and Chief of Police will seek additional funding to support efforts by victim advocates and medical providers to better connect survivors to care and support services, so they are treated with respect and compassion and that their crime reports are responded to with urgency following current trauma-informed practices.
- c. The Police Department shall review how victims of crimes of violence are kept informed about the status of their case from the point of initial reporting through the end of follow-up investigations, if any, to strengthen relationships between victims and the police, demonstrate respect for victims, and to acknowledge the dignity and worth of every individual.
- d. The Police Department and Human Services Department will ensure that officers, contracted providers, advocates, and others who interact with sexual assault survivors are directed to inform survivors that they should call 911 to report an assault – even when it is not “in progress” – and not call the non-emergency line.

1. Assessment of Criminal Case Management Practices and Systems Used by the Police Department and Regional Partners

- a. The Police Department shall engage national policing and criminal legal system experts to conduct a systemic review of police investigations of serious criminal offenses, assess current practices and procedures related to criminal case follow-up investigations, including case triage and assignment decisions, investigation rules and procedures, case file preparation, case file presentation-to-prosecutor practices, victim care services, and all management and review practices to determine the sufficiency and quality of investigations, all with the goal of continuous organizational improvement.

The assessment should include system-wide identification of what is working well, what needs to be changed, what additional tools may be necessary, the appropriate types of follow-up units and their organization and staffing, case clearance rates compared to other similarly situated police agencies, and additional observations or recommendations the assessment team may wish to offer. The assessment should emphasize how investigators interact with victims of crime, how victims are cared for, and whether the most current trauma-informed practices are followed.

- b. The retained subject matter experts shall assist the Police Department in creating a follow-up investigations manual of rules, procedures, and acceptable practices to

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govern the work of follow-up detectives to ensure continuing compliance with accepted best practices and legal requirements.

- c. The work of the subject matter experts shall also assess the effectiveness of the victim care and support services currently provided by the City, including appropriate staffing levels, qualifications of victim advocates, and where this body of work should be housed to optimize effectiveness, advance justice, assist victims with understanding and navigating the police investigation process and, potentially, court processes and disposition of the case. This work aims to place the dignity and well-being of survivors of violent crime at the center of the Police Department's work.

2. Ongoing Case Review and Appointment of an Advisory Panel

- a. The Police Department shall partner with subject-matter experts and appropriate organizations, including the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission, to implement a series of ongoing case reviews of sexual assault investigations to help detectives prepare cases, improve processes, and care for and assist survivors.
- b. The Mayor and the Chief of Police will appoint an advisory panel of no more than six local sexual assault subject-matter experts and victim-survivors to assist the Police Department with the assessments identified in this order. This advisory panel will provide an outside perspective and their experiences with widely used and accepted best practices.

3. Collective Bargaining Law and Processes

- a. In fulfilling this Executive Order, the City will comply in good faith with all required collective bargaining laws and processes.

Dated this 28th day of July 2022.



Bruce A. Harrell
Mayor of Seattle

APPENDIX B

List of Recommendations and Mayor's Office Responses

Recommendation 1:

The City of Seattle should develop systematic reporting on gun violence patterns to City departments, other government agencies, elected officials, and the public/community stakeholders. The U.S. Department of Justice (through the Office of Justice Programs and the Police Executive Research Forum) is willing, as federal funding permits, to continue to provide technical assistance to Seattle to address this recommendation.

Mayor's Office Concurrence: Concur

Mayor's Office Response: "Consistent with this recommendation, SPD will further its existing plan to continuously expand and improve its online reporting within legal, ethical, and regulatory restrictions."

Recommendation 2:

The Mayor's Office should provide an update to the Seattle City Council on the Community Assisted Response and Engagement Department's (CARE) ordinance-mandated new initiative to integrate the City's violence intervention programs. This should include the feasibility of CARE to convene City departments and partners involved with violence prevention and response and to help disseminate systematic reporting on gun violence patterns.

Mayor's Office Concurrence: Concur

Mayor's Office Response: "We are prepared to update Council members on the status of the CARE Department enabling ordinance regarding the potential integration of violence intervention programs and improved data collection, sharing, and dissemination."

Recommendation 3:

The City of Seattle should improve its capacity for problem analysis to address gun violence, including 1.) implementing problem-oriented policing, 2.) exploring the use of problem analyses such as homicide reviews and place network investigations, and 3.) requiring organizations that receive City funding to address gun violence to complete evidence-based problem-solving training.

Mayor's Office Concurrence: Concur

Mayor's Office Response: "Chief Barnes, having successfully implemented a problem-oriented approach in Madison, will introduce in Seattle his model of stratified policing to address immediate, short-term, and long-term complex public safety challenges, rooted in evidence-based practice and within a structure of organizational accountability. In addition, the Real Time Crime Center, including recently approved CCTV capabilities, will enable a faster, more efficient, and more precise approach to crime response later this year."

Recommendation 4:

To address gun violence the City of Seattle should implement a framework for regular systematic coordination among City departments, other government entities, and community organizations.

Mayor's Office Concurrence: Concur

Mayor's Office Response: "The City has taken the first step towards implementing this recommendation by establishing the multi-department and multi-stakeholder DAT [Downtown Activation Team]. The City will be further expanding on this approach with the anticipated launch of the One Seattle Restoration Subcabinet. This entity will be responsible for the oversight of the various cross-sector initiatives and investments identified in the [Mayor's Restoration] Framework, as well as driving an integrated and data-centric strategy to address our most pressing public safety issues, including gun violence."

APPENDIX C

Previous Audits Conducted by the Office of City Auditor Related to Crime and Violence Prevention

Since 2012, the Office of City Auditor has conducted audits related to the City's crime prevention investments, youth violence prevention, and street outreach for violence prevention.¹⁷

Although we recommended in these audits that the City evaluate its violence prevention investments to ensure that they are effective, these evaluations have not occurred. For example, during this audit, Human Services Department (HSD) management reported to us that the City had not received any evaluation information from its investments in the King County Regional Peacekeepers Collective that the City has been funding since 2021. HSD indicated that they anticipate that they will receive the final evaluation from King County when it is completed.

Crime Prevention Review: In 2012, at the request of the City Council, we worked with researchers at the [Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy](#) to produce a report about [the research evidence underpinning the City's investments in crime prevention](#). The primary finding of the report was of the 63 programs reviewed:

- 17 had strong or moderate evidence of effectiveness
- 35 had inconclusive evidence of effectiveness
- 3 had evidence for increasing crime
- 8 programs couldn't be matched to research or theory

The report also noted that while it is important to understand whether research indicates that a program is likely to be effective in reducing crime, we couldn't know whether all these City programs were effective in reducing crime because many did not measure their outcomes.

Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (SYVPI): The City started SYVPI in 2009 to respond to the violent deaths of five young people. In response to a City Council request, we published two reports in [January](#) and [March](#) 2013 on SYVPI's logic model in which we raised questions about whether there was a clear linkage between SYVPI's strategies and its long-term outcomes measures. In [October 2014](#), we published a consultant report that found a rigorous

¹⁷ Street outreach workers seek to connect with individuals engaged in violence to attempt to build positive relationships, discourage violent behavior, and connect the individuals with services. Street outreach workers may also mediate emerging conflicts among individuals or groups.

evaluation of SYVPI's effectiveness was not possible at the time due to issues with the initiative's design and implementation. The report outlined a series of steps that SYVPI could take to get ready for an evaluation in the future. In [October 2015](#), we published a report on SYVPI that summarized two key conclusions from our previous SYVPI reports: 1) Changing adult-run systems can yield positive results for youth, and 2) support from City leaders can help ensure that efforts are focused and effective.

Street Outreach: In [October 2015](#), we published a report on street outreach for violence prevention. The report concluded that street outreach had the potential to be a valuable component of a comprehensive violence reduction strategy for Seattle. However, research indicated that street outreach could be ineffective and might even cause harm to the people it is intended to serve when it is not deployed strategically and when it lacks certain key considerations. We made six recommendations to the City for strengthening its approach to street outreach. To date, three of the six recommendations have been implemented, and in 2024, we stopped [tracking the status of the three remaining recommendations](#)¹⁸ [because we had no evidence that they would ever be implemented](#).

¹⁸ The three 2015 street outreach recommendations that went unimplemented are:

- Develop a more sophisticated focused approach for identifying street outreach clients to ensure that it is focused on those at highest risk for violence and victimization;
- Strengthen the ability of street outreach to connect their clients' families with services that promote the importance of family as a protective factor; and
- Support a rigorous evaluation of street outreach to ensure that the efforts are effective for reducing violent crime and victimization and do not unintentionally cause harm.

As documented in our [chronicle of unimplemented recommendations from the Street Outreach audit](#), during this period HSD conducted multiple reviews of its community safety investments, re-aligned its investments multiple times, and developed and issued multiple requests for proposals (RFPs) for community safety investments.

APPENDIX D

Seattle Office of City Auditor Mission, Background, and Quality Assurance

Our Mission:

We conduct independent analyses of City programs and services with an equity and social justice perspective, making recommendations on ways the City can better serve the people of Seattle.

Background:

Seattle voters established our office by a 1991 amendment to the City Charter. The office is an independent department within the legislative branch of City government. The City Auditor reports to the City Council and has a four-year term to ensure their independence in deciding what work the office should perform and reporting the results of this work. The Office of City Auditor conducts performance audits and non-audit projects covering City of Seattle programs, departments, grants, and contracts. The City Auditor's goal is to ensure that the City of Seattle is run as effectively, efficiently, and equitably as possible in compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

How We Ensure Quality:

The office's work is performed in accordance with the Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. These standards provide guidelines for audit planning, fieldwork, quality control systems, staff training, and reporting of results. In addition, the standards require that external auditors periodically review our office's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that we adhere to these professional standards.

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