

Sen. Johnson: While Gov. Evers acts to prevent violence, Republicans have chosen to ignore it

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MADISON – Senator LaTonya Johnson released the following statement regarding gun violence in Milwaukee and the refusal of Republican legislators to meaningfully address neighborhood violence:

“Nearly eight years ago I attended the funeral of ten-year-old Sierra Guyton after she was caught in a crossfire on an elementary school playground. Sierra’s funeral was the first I’d ever attended while in office for a child victim of gun violence, and I promised myself that her funeral would be the last. Sadly, it was only the beginning.

“Across our state and the nation, we continue to see families devastated by gun violence, some losing their lives on playgrounds, at shopping centers, places of worship, concerts, nightclubs, and even in their own homes. There were 194 gun homicides and 871 non-fatal shootings in Milwaukee last year, surpassing the record of 190 gun homicides and 764 non-fatal shootings set in 2020, just the year before.

“My community is tired of turning on the television only to learn of another senseless shooting in our city, and we are tired of Republicans picking and choosing when they decide to care about gun violence. Milwaukee matters, the lives of our children, and our neighbors matter. WE matter!!!!

“On November 7, 2019, when Governor Evers called for a special session on gun violence, I showed up to do my job so that no family has to go through what the families of children like Sierra Guyton (10), Laylah Peterson (5), Baby Bill Thao (13 months), Sandra Parks (13), Brooklyn Harris (3), or Ta’Niyah Parker (11) have had

to endure. The funerals have been too many to name them all.

“Not only did Wisconsin Republicans fail to show up and do their jobs on that day in November, but they have continued, year after year, to reject widely-supported gun violence prevention policies like universal background checks.

“As a member of the Joint Finance Committee, I was encouraged to see that Governor Evers’ Budget included a proposal to give Milwaukee the funding flexibility and resources they need to address public safety, among other issues that uniquely impact our state’s largest city. Over the last ten years, legislative Republicans have continually reduced local government funding; squeezing budgets needed to support public health & safety agencies, first responders, libraries, and other essential services.

“Despite Republicans’ refusal to act, Governor Evers used his executive authority to invest in both tackling crime as well as addressing its root causes. The governor has directed more than \$100 million toward enhancing public safety across the state, including \$45 million to support violence prevention efforts and crime victims. A variety of funding went to local organizations already doing this work, including the Medical College of Wisconsin’s Violence Prevention Project and the City of Milwaukee’s Office of Violence Prevention.

“Milwaukee Police Department recovered 3,097 guns and responded to 13,320 ShotSpotter activations in 2020, they recovered 3,279 guns and responded to 17,002 ShotSpotter activations in 2022. Our officers are outgunned!

“The bottom line is this: during my time in the Legislature I have pleaded for my Republican colleagues to address this issue in a meaningful way. Their solutions are always to hire more police and increase penalties but never to pass legislation that would close gun loopholes to help rid our city of the abundance of guns on our city streets.

“I even organized an opportunity for legislators to see Milwaukee’s gun court first-hand and talk with judges who work there, and only a handful of the members of the majority party took me up on this.

“Wisconsin Republicans are always the first ones to demonize my city—to line up at press conferences and tell us they know better; to blame us for the criminal actions of a few, and they are also the first ones to tell us ‘No’ when we ask for help. It’s

time they stop fearing gun lobbyists and start fearing for the victims, families, friends and neighbors of those who have to live with these casualties and statistics every single day.

“So, until I start hearing more than lip service from the same people responsible for starving my city of revenue and making it a dumping ground for illegal guns, you’ll have to forgive me for disbelieving the bullshit and phony concerns from Republicans who have chosen not to act time and time again. I refuse to allow my colleagues and those vying for the highest office in the State to divide our city simply because their cash cow (Milwaukee’s Downtown) has been affected. The importance of life and our quality of life isn’t based on generated revenue and it’s most definitely not simply a talking point for the Republican Party.”