

LETTER IN STAR TRIBUNE, MAY 28, 2016



Earlier this month, an impromptu memorial of balloons and flowers was established near the spot where 25-year-old Derrick E. Rodgers of Minneapolis had been fatally shot.

Picture, if you will, one leg of a three-legged stool striving to hold up the full weight of a seated person by itself. That's the image that came to mind when I read the May 26 Star Tribune article "Gun carnage rises, but answer elusive." In the article, several sources assigned responsibility for solving the problem of escalating gun violence to the Minneapolis Police Department.

In and of itself, the best policing will never be sufficient to solve the complex problem of urban gun violence. In addition to law enforcement, we need to invest significant resources in addressing persistent social, educational and economic disparities in communities of color. And we need stronger, more comprehensive gun laws.

A 2013 study published in JAMA Internal Medicine showed that states with the most gun laws have the lowest rates of death by gun violence, both suicides and homicides. Multiple recent reports on urban gun violence specifically have shown that strong gun laws, when combined with sustained community investment and effective law enforcement, can decrease entrenched urban gun violence by as much as 42 percent. The laws most associated with decreases in gun homicides include criminal background checks before all gun sales, mandated reporting of lost and stolen guns, permit-to-purchase laws, increased oversight of licensed dealers to prevent trafficking, and tougher penalties for straw buyers. Minnesota law is insufficient in all these respects.

We expect a lot from law enforcement, as well we should. But it is both unfair and futile to expect the Minneapolis Police Department, or any police department, to carry the weight of urban gun violence alone. Sustained community engagement and common-sense gun legislation are the two missing legs of the stool. Until we commit to addressing these deficits, we can expect to topple over amid the flying bullets.

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Link to original article: <http://www.startribune.com/as-killings-plague-north-minneapolis-no-concrete-solution-in-sight/380901851/#1>