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Letters to the Editor: Cost of murder impacts communities

To the Editor:

Melvin Claxton's superb series on the cost of murder, which appeared in The Tennessean at the time our state was contemplating dual executions, has profoundly illustrated the impact of homicide. The report did not just reduce all this death to an accounting of public dollars but also assessed the other hidden financial costs to society.

The costs of a murder trial can be determined where the taxpayer foots the bill for the public defender. More frequently family and friends expend resources to hire private attorneys. These costs, which are by definition confidential, severely impact the finances of all but the most affluent. There is no way to measure the grief of the families.

With a better understanding of the economic impact of homicide, we can engage in real debate as to those factors that contribute to the increasing number of murders in our community. Intelligent firearm regulation may be something we can finally talk about.

Dismantling our mental institutions and replacing them with penitentiaries may not have been an appropriate choice. More severe sanctions for older juvenile delinquents might be in order. Expending prison resources for inmates whose crimes are predictors of future homicides might make more sense than incarcerating legless geriatric prisoners.

The first human conflict mentioned in the Bible ended in a murder. It may be that homicide will always be with us, but it is well to understand that the expense of murder spirals as the waves of impact extend beyond those costs which Mr. Claxton so ably calculated.

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