

Gun Violence in America Can and Must be Challenged!

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According to the National Gun Violence Archive's annual statistics (through 11/20/22), there have been 601 mass shootings. That is almost 2 mass shootings a day. According to this source, we have had 39,325 people killed in America by gun violence with an additional 34,928 people injured. The impact of gun violence disproportionately affects young people, particularly young men of color. Guns are also commonly used for suicide. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) over 20,000 youth age 15 – 19 died by suicide. Homicide and Suicide combined account for more than half of the deaths of young people by guns. Tragically, these are preventable deaths.

Our national laws aren't doing enough to stop the violence. The US is distinguished by its horrendous level of gun violence. Australia, Canada, England, and New Zealand have had tragic mass shootings, but instead of stopping with kind thoughts and prayers, they made significant policy changes to prevent future mass shootings. England banned the purchase of semiautomatic weapons within a year after the Dunblane Primary school shooting in 1996. To date, that has been their worst mass shooting. One teacher and 16 students died. Fifteen students were wounded. Australia had a gun buyback program that collected over 1 million guns that were later melted down. In Canada, Prime Minister Trudeau strengthened background checks. Over 1,500 models of assault weapons are banned in Canada. Germany has strong licensing requirements for gun ownership and regulates ammunition as well as gun ownership. New Zealand restricts machine guns, assault rifles, and military style semi-automatic rifles.

Nationally, repeal of the "Protection of Lawful Commerce for Firearms Manufactures" would remove protection from liability from gun manufacturers. Gun manufacturers make massive profits and need to be held accountable. Gun Violence costs America \$229 Billion annually, that is more than \$700 per person. Costs include response from first providers, legal proceedings, medical treatment, and long-term care. Hidden costs like the lifetime effects of trauma on the victims and their families and friends cannot be calculated. Nor can we calculate the negative effects and poor quality of life for people in this country who do not feel safe in their school, church, mosque, temple, supermarket, movie theater, night club, park, or neighborhood.

Citizens in Falmouth, MA successfully developed a petition to prevent the resale of AR-15s by their police department. The petition will be voted on in November 2022. Up until this time, police in Falmouth have been able to sell confiscated weapons back to gun dealers which keeps them in circulation. The petition would specifically prevent assault weapons from re-entering the open market. Instead, the weapons would be destroyed. Surely other towns could pass similar regulations.

Contrary to common belief, more guns do not make us safer. Instead more guns result in more shootings. In this country, there are more guns than there are people, more than one gun per person. It is because we have so many guns in this country that we have many more deaths and injuries. There are more completed suicides in states with more guns. There are more deaths and injuries in domestic violence. And, most tragically there are more mass shootings when guns, especially when high-powered guns are easily available. Sadly, children in this country are more likely to die in a school shooting than in a car accident.

We need to question a culture that puts more value on a personal right to bear arms than on a personal right to feel safe. We should ask a basic question. What are guns for? Guns are made to

intimidate, shoot, injure, and kill. Why do we tolerate the easy access to guns? If we can have public health regulations restricting the sale of alcohol and cigarettes to minors and smoking in public spaces, we can regulate buying guns and ammunition.

It has been over 20 years since the Columbine school shooting that shocked people all over the world. How many more school shootings do we need before we take needed action? In Michael Moore's 2002 documentary film about the Columbine shooting, comedian Eddie Murphy jokingly proposed a terrific solution. What if the cost of a single bullet went up to \$500, with inflation let's say \$2,000 per bullet. It would become too expensive to shoot people. Let's show real respect for human life, by having stricter laws to reduce access to guns, especially semi-automatics. We all deserve a right to personal safety, especially our children.