

March 22, 2021

Senator Richard J. Durbin  
Chair  
United State Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Durbin,

The American Academy of Pediatrics is pleased to submit this statement for the record for the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on Constitutional and Common Sense Steps to Reduce Gun Violence on March 23, 2021.

Gun violence is a pervasive public health threat that significantly impacts children. In 2019, the most recent year for which we have data, firearm-related injuries led to 39,707 fatalities.<sup>i</sup> Firearm-related injuries remain one of the top three causes of death in American youth. Exposure to gun violence also contributes to toxic stress and harms children's health and development. And children of color face disproportionate risk for experiencing firearm-related injuries and deaths, contributing to and exacerbating health disparities. For these reasons, pediatricians have long advocated for policies to protect children from the dangers of firearm-related morbidity and mortality.

The AAP strongly supports continuing and expanding federal funding for research to prevent firearm-related morbidity and mortality at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). We would like to thank Congress for providing \$25 million for this public health research to the CDC and NIH in FY20 and for continuing this funding in the Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY 2021. This initial investment was a crucial step toward applying a public health approach to increasing gun safety and reducing firearm-related injuries and deaths, and we are excited to see these funds contributing to important research projects that are now underway. We urge Congress to expand that funding to \$50 million shared evenly between CDC and NIH in FY 2022.

Continued and expanded funding could support the creation of additional, large, multi-year studies and accelerate the rebuilding of a research community that shrank in the decades before Congress restored this federal funding. Robust and sustained research on motor vehicle crashes and subsequent legislation has helped save hundreds of thousands of lives through public health interventions, including seat belts and other safety features. The same approach can help reduce firearm-related injuries in our communities, including ensuring that the CDC and NIH are able to adequately fund non-biased, evidence-based research into this public health priority.

The AAP also supports expanding background checks to apply to all firearm purchases and transfers. Current federal policy requires background checks for firearm sales by federally licensed firearms dealers. This is a public health intervention that works; since federal enactment of this policy in 1994, it has prevented over 3 million people legally prohibited from possessing a firearm from obtaining one.<sup>ii</sup> Unfortunately, this policy does not currently apply to sales at gun shows, through online marketplaces, or between private individuals. This loophole enables individuals who are not legally allowed to possess firearms to purchase them, presenting a serious risk to children and families.

The AAP supports the *Background Check Expansion Act* (S. 529) and the *Bipartisan Background Check Act* (H.R. 8), which would require a background check for every firearm sale and most firearm transfers. This is a common-

sense step to protect children from firearm-related injuries and deaths. This policy would ensure that all firearm sales and most firearm transfers would require the same background check process that has worked well for sales at federally licensed firearms dealers. Updating federal law to institute universal background checks will better protect children from the devastating effects of firearm-related morbidity and mortality.

AAP also supports a broad array of other means for reducing the devastating toll of firearm violence on children, their families, and their communities, including supporting and funding youth violence prevention programming, effective physician counseling to reduce the risk of firearm-related injury and death, banning assault weapons, and other interventions to reduce child access to firearms. We welcome the opportunity to work with policymakers to reduce the risk of injury and death from firearms that children and adolescents face.

Thank you again for your leadership in working to protect our nation's children from firearm-related injury and death. If the AAP can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Zach Laris in our Washington, D.C. office at 202/347-8600 or [zlaris@aap.org](mailto:zlaris@aap.org).

Sincerely,  
American Academy of Pediatrics

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<sup>i</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. Accessed February 16, 2021. Available at: [www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars).

<sup>ii</sup> Jennifer Karberg, et al., "Background Checks for Firearm Transfers, 2015—Statistical Tables," US Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics (2017), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/bcft15st.pdf>.