



March 22, 2021

The Honorable Dick Durbin
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairman Durbin:

Gun violence is a public health crisis in our country—an epidemic that we have failed to treat at its root because the desires of the National Rifle Association and gun manufacturers have trumped the needs of children, parents, educators and responsible gun owners, who all agree on the need for commonsense gun safety measures. Gun violence is not an immutable fact of life that we must be prepared for—it is a consequence of decisions made by our elected leaders. In recent years, the Senate has been silent regarding this scourge that has destroyed lives and communities. So, on behalf of the 1.7 million members of the American Federation of Teachers, thank you, Chairman Durbin, for organizing this important hearing on “Constitutional and Common Sense Steps to Reduce Gun Violence.”

I represent healthcare professionals, educators and law enforcement professionals. AFT members have witnessed and experienced the results of gun violence at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, and countless other schools where the violence does not make the nightly news. Our nurses and healthcare professional members work to heal both bullet wounds and psychological wounds. Many of our students and patients have seen their friends, parents, siblings, cousins and neighbors shot, yet have not experienced the love and outpouring of support from a nation sharing their suffering. No teacher should have to shield their students from bullets. No child should have to live in fear of getting shot. And no parent should have to worry that their child isn't safe when not at home. We must enact commonsense gun violence prevention legislation. Here are some examples.

H.R. 8, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act, calls for expanding the background check system while leaving important exceptions. Right now, too many loopholes make it too easy for guns to get into our communities, causing violence in our schools, our places of worship and other public places that should be safe sanctuaries.

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

American Federation
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

AFT Teachers
AFT PSRP
AFT Higher Education
AFT Public Employees
AFT Nurses and Health
Professionals

555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
202-879-4400
www.aft.org

Randi Weingarten
PRESIDENT

Fedrick C. Ingram
SECRETARY-TREASURER

Evelyn DeJesus
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

VICE PRESIDENTS

J. Philippe Abraham
Shelvy Y. Abrams
Frederick Albert
Elba L. Aponte Santos
Barbara Bowen
Vicky Rae Byrd
Zeph Capo
Donald Carlisto
Larry J. Carter, Jr.
Kathy A. Chavez
Donna M. Chiera
Melissa Cropper
Amanda Curtis
Jolene T. DiBrango
GlenEva Dunham
Marietta A. English
Francis J. Flynn
Jeffery M. Freitas
Lisa Gourley
David Gray
Ron Gross
Anthony M. Harmon
David Hecker
Karla Hernandez-Mats
Jan Hochadel
Jerry T. Jordan
Frederick E. Kowal
Stephanie Ly
Terrence Martin, Sr.
John McDonald
Daniel J. Montgomery
Michael Mulgrew
Andrew Pallotta
Donna Phillips, RN
Juan Ramirez
Jesse Sharkey
Andrew Spar
Denise Specht
Wayne Spence
Jessica J. Tang
Adam Urbanski
Debbie White, RN
Carl Williams



H.R. 1446, the Enhanced Background Checks Act, simply gives the FBI more time to complete a background check. This additional time might have prevented the person who slaughtered churchgoers in Charleston, S.C., from buying his murder weapon.

The AFT also supports restricting access to assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, requiring the safe storage of firearms, rescinding the gun industry's liability immunity, establishing extreme risk protection order policies that allow the temporary removal of firearms from individuals deemed to be a danger to their communities, and preventing those convicted of a hate crime from having access to firearms.

I hope the committee does not waste time on proposals that will make schools less safe, like arming teachers, and instead focuses on sensible steps we can take right now to create safe schools and communities. This begins by ensuring support services are widely available for students, including having a counselor in every school. Another step is to turn neighborhood schools into community schools—the focal point and heart of their communities. In schools facing high levels of violence in, or outside, the school building, a community school might utilize district, state and federal support to fund programs that reduce suspension rates, provide alternatives to out-of-school suspensions that offer meaningful educational opportunities for students, and incorporate inclusive restorative justice into discipline policies.

It is time to end gun violence. We know that this problem can be solved; it has been, in other countries. I call on you to make this hearing a launch pad for the consideration and passage of H.R. 8, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act and the H.R. 1446, the Enhanced Background Checks Act. AFT members will not rest until we prevent weapons from getting into the hands of people who want to massacre innocents.

Sincerely,



Randi Weingarten
President

RW : emc opeiu #2 afl-cio