

Congressional Testimony of Miya Rahamim, daughter of a victim of gun violence  
Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing: "What Should America Do About Gun Violence?"  
January 30, 2013

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Nothing prepares you to hear the news that your father has been murdered with a gun. One Thursday last September, my 17-year-old brother was on a bus going to visit a friend, when he saw an early report that there was a shooting in the Bryn Mawr neighborhood in Minneapolis. This is a small neighborhood where my dad had built his business. My dad was an immigrant living the American dream, extremely proud that all of his products were made in America. He created dozens of jobs over the years, invented a system of Braille that made it easier for blind people to read signs, and exported products all over the world, including, as he loved to tell people, to China. My brother sent a text message to my dad telling him that he heard that there had been a shooting nearby and to be careful. Of course, what he did not know – what none of us knew at the time – was that his text to our dad would go unanswered because, just shortly before, my dad had been shot twice in the head at the company he had built. This is something that I will go to bed every night and wake up every morning knowing. The gunman killed or fatally wounded six fathers that day, all of them leaving behind their children far too soon.

The key factor about the gun violence prevention legislation introduced in the 113th Congress is this: It will save lives. The gun used to kill my father and five other fathers had a capacity of 15 rounds. A law limiting the capacity to 10 rounds might have saved lives. Requiring background checks for all gun sales will save lives. While Congress cannot prevent every death from gun violence, it has a moral obligation to attempt to save as many lives as possible. By passing this legislation, Congress can prevent some Americans from receiving the call that is dreaded most – that their father or mother, brother or sister, spouse or child will not be coming home. This legislation will have great impact on the most important thing in our lives – our families.

I want my story told so that other families will not have to go through the devastation that mine has been through, when it is often times preventable through sensible gun violence prevention policies. My dad lived the American dream, but died the American nightmare. The U.S. has a disproportionately high rate of gun violence. America's gun-homicide rate is *20 times* that of other industrialized nations. According to David Hemenway, Harvard professor of health policy and management and director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center, an American child is *13 times* more likely to be killed by a gun than his or her counterpart in Japan, Italy, or other industrialized countries. Gun violence kills 33 Americans every day, and more than 12,000 Americans will be murdered with guns over the next year if no action is taken to stop the gun violence epidemic. Many of these gun deaths are preventable. But under the current policies, the United States has the highest per capita rate of firearm-related murders of all developed countries. We should not be ok with being the leading developed country in gun-related homicides.

### Background Checks

There is not just a loophole in background checks – there is a gaping hole. At least 40% of gun sales are made without background checks. There are websites that direct people to two possible ways of obtaining a gun: through a registered firearms dealer, where a background check would be required, or through a private sale, where no background check would be required as long as the sale is conducted within state lines. It is clear which route people who know they would not pass a background check will choose. This is akin to offering two security lines, one with a metal detector and one without, and allowing everyone, including terrorists, to decide which line they want to go through. In a national survey of prison inmates, 80% of inmates who used a handgun in a crime said that they acquired it through a transaction with a private seller. Further, the number of women killed with a gun by an intimate partner is 34% lower in states that have closed the private sales loophole than in states that have not. The proposed safeguard will save lives.

Under the current policy, the shooter in the October 2012 Wisconsin spa shooting, who would not have been able to pass a background check due to a restraining order that his estranged wife had against him, was able to easily obtain a gun. He simply went online, found a private seller, met him in the parking lot of a fast food restaurant and purchased the weapon without a background check, which he then used to kill his wife and two other women and injure four people. The background check system only works as it should when it is applied universally, without a simple way for criminals and others who know that they will not pass a background check to easily opt out of the system.

### The Assault Weapons Ban and Ban on High Capacity Magazines

Assault weapons and high capacity magazines are designed for a specific purpose: to kill as many people as possible as quickly as possible. General Stanley McChrystal backed a ban on assault weapons, saying that these military-style weapons belong in the hands of soldiers, not on the streets, and that these weapons are designed to have devastating effects on the human body. In the Aurora movie theater shooting, the gunman used, among other weapons, an AR-15 assault weapon, modeled after the military M-16 rifle, with a 100 round barrel magazine, whose production and transfer would be barred under the bill under consideration. It allowed him to shoot 70 people, killing 12 people and wounding 58 others in less than two minutes. The legislation to limit the capacity of semi-automatic magazines to 10 rounds may have limited the number of children killed in Newtown, Connecticut and the number of people killed in the Minneapolis workplace shooting that resulted in my father's death.

### Establishment of a Federal Gun Trafficking Law

The federal gun trafficking law is a common sense proposal to crack down on straw purchasers, those who pass background checks and buy guns to give to criminals or others forbidden from purchasing them. Under the current policies, trafficking in deadly weapons carries the same federal penalties as trafficking chicken or livestock. Many people would be surprised that this bill is not already a law.

The proposed reforms are common sense harm-reduction policies to address what many people consider to be the biggest public health and safety issue facing the nation today. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), which supports the proposed legislation, gun injuries cause twice as many deaths as cancer, five times as many as heart disease, and 15 times as many infections. The pediatricians in the AAP note that firearm-related deaths are one of the top three causes of death in American youth. We cannot let this continue. In the face of the epidemic of gun violence, Congress must act now. I have a personal plea to each of you who are entrusted to consider this legislation: Imagine yourself sending that text that goes unanswered, or receiving that dreaded phone call about a loved one. You have the power to save lives. Please take action now.