

Testimony of Chris Cheng
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United States Senate
Committee on the Judiciary

Constitutional and Common Sense Steps to Reduce Gun Violence
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Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

My name is Chris Cheng, and I am honored to testify today about constitutional and common-sense steps to reduce gun violence. As a gay Asian American professional sport shooter, this hearing is very timely and essential to our national conversation on civil rights and our future as a peaceful nation.

I am here representing myself and only myself today to share my quintessential American story. In 2012, I earned the title of History Channel's Top Shot Season 4 Champion. Only in America could a self-taught amateur shooter win \$100,000—beating out 17 professionals --- and receive a professional shooting contract with Bass Pro Shops. After this achievement, I quit my job at Google, switched careers, and focused on firearms, culture, and their role in American history. Today I am considered an expert in this field.

I earned a master's degree in policy studies from Middlebury College in 2006. Following my Top Shot win, I naturally wanted to research gun policy and history. I was appalled to discover how gun control has been used to discriminate against and control people in our country. While our Black brothers and sisters have possibly experienced the most negative impacts of gun control through centuries of structural racism at the hands of the U.S. government, Asian Americans have not escaped structural racism either. I will share two examples:

First, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the first federal law to explicitly prohibit the immigration of people of a particular nationality and set a dangerous precedent for future xenophobic mandates. Secondly, in response to mounting pressures during World War II to "ensure national security and safety," Executive Order 9066 mandated that more than 110,000 innocent Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from their homes and relocated to internment camps. This order stripped my Japanese ancestors of their rights and civil liberties. **The goal was to keep us unarmed, invisible, and silent.**

Any critical thinker will find parallel fallacies in how the above policies would make the country safer, and the argument that bills like H.R. 1446 (the Enhanced Background Checks Act of



2021), and H.R.8 (the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2021), will somehow make us safer.

The Chinese Exclusion Act and the Executive Order creating the Japanese Internment Camps were only successful in explicitly and in effect, targeting minorities without evidence and creating a perception that the government was “doing something.” But, this is just another example of the unconstitutional denial of civil rights and civil liberties.

That’s in the past. So where are we today, right here, right now?

We are here to discuss effectively reducing violence without punishing law-abiding citizens.

With the 149% rise in anti-Asian American violence over the past year, Asian Americans are flocking to gun stores and private gun owners in droves, many seeking to purchase their first firearm. There is a real and imminent threat. We need to defend ourselves. Not three days or 20 days from now, but today. Right now. With increased pressure and decreasing budgets for first responders and police, I encourage people to train to be their own first responder. There is no guarantee that help will arrive in time.

Universal background checks will not help. I live in San Francisco, where if I want to give or sell a personal firearm to a friend or family member, they cannot have it immediately. They must wait, ten days. I should not have to conduct a background check on my friend, who is not a prohibited person, and delay their ability to protect themselves or against violent attacks. There should not be a stopwatch on when the Second Amendment applies.

Every year, millions of Americans legally purchase firearms. In comparison, only a few thousand criminals or mentally ill individuals acquire guns and use them to commit homicide. It’s millions of law-abiding citizens vs. thousands of criminals.

Are we going to let the criminal minority take away the rights of the majority, which are supposed to be guaranteed to us by our Constitution? I am against H.R. 8 and 1446 because they represent a threat to the public safety of Asian Americans and all Americans who have an imminent need to defend themselves. *(Similarly, I commend the Senate and House—as the joint session resumed its work on January 6 and refused to let the horrific lawless actions of a few be victorious over the rule of law, order, and our democracy. The same perspective should apply here.)*

Earlier, I spoke about the racist roots of gun control. But what’s worse than systemic, racist gun control policies? Poorly thought-out gun control policies that will negatively impact Americans of all walks of life; all races, genders, and sexual orientations in America. I will expand:

I am a gay American and have been happily married to my husband of five and a half years. Today we see a rise in attacks against Asian Americans, but tomorrow I might be back here



talking about the persistent, on-going violence against LGBTQ Americans. I've lived through how the phrase "gay virus" to describe AIDS stokes the same fears and dehumanization elicited by the words "Chinese virus." This derogatory language contributes to a less safe, less empathetic society. I will continue speaking out against hate and violence in all forms, and I encourage all Americans to participate in what should be a simple, universal condemnation of hatred and violence. We should not be afraid of saying that we will not tolerate it, that it is unacceptable, and that it must stop.

At the core of our country's violence problem is not firearms, or any weapon for that matter. The root causes of human violence and hate are many: socioeconomic, low self-esteem, lack of mental health resources, lack of community, lack of educational and job opportunities, and a lack of humanity.

Let me be explicit, violence and hate are the symptoms we see. The causes are lack of economic opportunity, emotional security, self-esteem, mental healthcare, and a supportive family and community life. Congress must focus on the actual causes of hate and violence, which will have a real, meaningful impact on making America safer.

These bills will not make an impact on gun violence. To have a meaningful impact, our courts must not dismiss charges or be lenient on those who break the existing laws. We should be enforcing the laws already enacted. In fact, my quintessential American success story proves that with proper education and training, anyone can learn gun safety. I would be happy to provide anyone on the Committee a lesson in the appropriate venue.

Thank you for allowing me to address this committee on the importance of gun safety and education, and condemn the brutality ravaging our communities today.