

Testimony of Max Schachter

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and Members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Max Schachter. In 2008, my wife passed away in her sleep. As a newly single father of two little boys, I thought that day would be the worst day of my life.

Several years later I would meet a woman with two little girls who lost her husband to a heart attack. We fell in love and decided to start a new life together in Parkland, Florida. It had been ranked the safest city in the state. On Valentine's Day 2018, I sent my son Alex to school, thinking that when I said goodbye to him, he would come back to me – and never for a moment did I think that he would be murdered in his English class. Now Alex is buried next to his mother in the cemetery.

After the shooting I was consumed with grief and anger. After 9/11, we made airplanes safer. After the Oklahoma City bombing, we made federal buildings safer. Yet, I could not understand how more than twenty years after Columbine, children and teachers could still be murdered in their classrooms.

I was determined to do everything I could to prevent this from happening again. My wife and I started our charity Safe Schools for Alex so that no other family would have to experience our pain. I traveled the country in search of solutions. While some school districts seemed well prepared for acts of gun violence, too many had the complacent attitude that Parkland did – that “It won't happen here”. Administrators and teachers frequently asked me the same question: “where do I find the best practices? Where do I begin?”.

Educators are not trained to be school security experts. School officials need proper guidance on what evidence-based practices work. That is why since 2018, I have advocated for the creation of a federal school safety clearinghouse, a streamlined one-stop shop for best practices, resources, and grant programs related to school safety. In 2020, this clearinghouse was launched on schoolsafety.gov. Schoolsafety.gov features materials from the Departments of Education, Justice, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services. The clearinghouse offers guidance on issues ranging from physical security measures to mental health counseling.

Today, I am here to ask Congress to pass two important bills to help make our schools safer. The first is the Luke and Alex School Safety Act, named in honor of my son and his friend Luke Hoyer. The bill, known as LASSA for short, would codify the federal clearinghouse I just described into law. LASSA would make the clearinghouse permanent and would require the Secretary of Education to actively inform all school districts around the country of the important resources it provides.

The second bill is the EAGLES Act, named after Alex's high school mascot, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Eagles. The U.S. Secret Service uses threat assessments to protect the President and senior government officials. Law enforcement uses them to prevent mass shootings. Our children deserve the same protection. The EAGLES Act would direct the National Threat Assessment Center of the Secret Service to establish a national program on preventing targeted school violence. The EAGLES Act would help bring the expertise of Secret Service professionals to the important goal of preventing school violence.

Protecting our kids from gun violence requires us to do everything we can to make schools safer. I am very grateful for the bipartisan support I have received for both LASSA and EAGLES, and now is the time to pass both bills into law.

We cannot focus on school safety only when a tragedy occurs. School safety must be a year-round priority. By passing LASSA and EAGLES, we can help save lives and prevent yet another Uvalde and Parkland.

Thank you.