

Testimony on Behalf of March For Our Lives
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Constitutional and Common Sense Steps to Reduce Gun Violence
March 23, 2021

Dear Chair Durbin, members of the Senate Judiciary Committee and distinguished guests,

Thank you for holding this important hearing on “Constitutional and Common Sense Steps to Reduce Gun Violence.” It is long past time that Congress take meaningful steps to reduce the rates of gun violence and begin to address its root causes.

Gun violence is a public health crisis and it must be treated as such – centering trauma-informed and victim-centered solutions. Over the last year alone, 41,000 lives were taken by gun violence in this country, the highest since 1981.¹ Rates of firearm death are rising among children and teens; firearms are now a leading cause of death among youth and the most common cause of death for young men.² A disproportionate amount of these deaths occur in Black and Brown communities, highlighting once again that gun violence prevention is a racial justice issue.³

Too often, gun violence impacts young people – in schools, in the home and in communities. Venues that were once considered safe havens of learning and peace have been turned into hostile environments, filled with “resource officers” that disproportionately penalize non-white students. And tragedies continue to occur. In the wake of shootings in schools, many have sought to increase the presence of firearms in schools, roll back campus firearm bans or arm teachers.⁴ More guns do not stop gun violence, and they do not make us safer.

A gun in the home triples the risk of gun suicide and doubles the risk of gun homicide. This country has almost 400 million firearms in civilian hands, yet also has the highest rate per capita of death by firearms and mass shootings of any other OECD country. More than 100 people are shot in America every day, with about two-thirds of those deaths by suicide.⁵

¹ Grace Hauck, *‘They’re not forgotten’: America’s other epidemic killed 41,000 people this year*, USA TODAY, Dec. 18, 2020. Available at: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/12/18/gun-violence-deaths-americans-2020/3906428001/>

² Rebecca Cunningham, *The Facts on the US Children and Teens Killed by Firearms*, University of Michigan Health Lab, Aug. 6, 2019. Available at: <https://labblog.uofmhealth.org/lab-report/facts-on-us-children-and-teens-killed-by-firearms>

³ *Id.*

⁴ Sari Kaufman, *Arming teachers won’t make students feel safer*, SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL, Apr. 16, 2019. Available at: <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/opinion/commentary/fl-op-com-kaufman-guns-teachers-20190416-story.html>

⁵ Key Statistics, The Facts that Make Us Act, Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. Available at: <https://www.bradyunited.org/key-statistics>

As you examine steps to reduce gun violence, it is crucially important you consult with some of the most impacted people: young people. Young people will tell you that we seek non-punitive reactive measures, investments in trained mental health professionals, common sense measures to reduce the prevalence of militarized weapons and smart regulation of firearms to reduce the risk of violence and harm.

It should not be the case that people with documented histories of white supremacy or threats of violence are able to buy a gun without any kind of background check, even through a private sale or at a gun show. Nor should it be the case that those who would otherwise fail a background check are allowed to purchase firearms simply because they ran out the clock. Closing these loopholes would immediately address real, tangible safety concerns that have already led to too many preventable deaths in this country.

In September 2019, young survivors of gun violence shared their stories before the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force, and urged the Senate to take action. Since then, there have been more deaths, more destruction, and more heartbreak for families and communities as lives have been senselessly cut short due to gun violence. But we have not seen important legislative action on background checks, reducing the prevalence of assault and other militarized weapons in our communities or robust funding for community-based violence interruption programs.

March For Our Lives was founded by survivors of a shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, which claimed the lives of 17 students and school staff. Our young activists are part of a generation committed to change, focused on action, that care about each other enough to demonstrate on behalf of the experiences and trauma of one another. Young people are tired of being tired, and we are tired of the trauma and violence. We seek to change America's gun culture in order to address this public health crisis. And we won't stop fighting until we make people's lives more important than the guns that steal them.

March For Our Lives is committed to working with the committee and Congress to pursue an end to gun violence through substantive legislative and funding means. We look forward to more opportunities to make our voices heard.