Testimony for Public Hearing of the Public Safety Committee on Gun Violence

Dear Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I am Dr. Curt Riebeling of Newtown, CT. I have lived in and served the people of Newtown through my chiropractic practice here for over 30 years. The unbelievably horrific shootings at Sandy Hook school, involving the massacre of twenty beautiful, promising, innocent first graders just beginning their lives, and six dedicated heroic educators has, I'm sure, had a deep and lasting impact on all of you. But I must tell you that seeing first-hand the overwhelming impact of this tragedy on the people of my community and feeling the devastating effects directly of this nightmare happening in my own hometown with my own neighbors, friends, and patients' lives being forever dramatically changed, has made me feel strongly that we must all be completely and utterly committed to doing everything reasonably possible to make sure that the chances of anything this horrific happening again are brought to an absolute minimum. That is why I implore you to support, pass, and enact effective legislation in line with President Obama's realistic proposals to require full background checks for any and all gun purchases, ban semiautomatic assault-type weapons and high count ammo magazines, explore ways to improve mental health care access and utilization, and investigate ways to decrease the deleterious effects of violent video games, movies and other media on our culture. I would also urge you to go a step further and pass the proposals of CT Against Gun Violence which would make it even harder for individuals to access military style weapons in order to commit mass murder.

I know you are hearing from people saying that you cannot pass this type of legislation because it would interfere with their second amendment rights. I would like to respectfully point out why this is not a valid argument concerning this question. First, while the second amendment guarantees the right to bear arms, it does not guarantee the right to own any and all types of weapons. Just as an individual is not allowed to own a nuclear weapon, a surface to air missile, biologic weapons, or other weapons of mass destruction, AR-15 rifles with 30 round magazines were designed for military use to kill many, many people in a short amount of time and there is no justification for private individuals to need access to them. The right to bear arms has necessary restrictions, especially when it interferes with the rights of others, just as all rights have some restrictions. Freedom of speech is restricted in that you cannot yell "fire" in a crowded theatre and risk causing panic an injury and you cannot commit liable or slander and injure someone's reputation with lies. A person's freedom to choose to smoke is limited in that they cannot choose to smoke in a public place where their second-hand smoke can be offensive and injurious to those around them. Enacting reasonable gun legislation does not interfere with the rights of responsible, qualified, legal gun ownership for hunting, sport, or self-defense, but it will decrease the chances of guns, and especially assault rifles, from getting into the hands of those wanting to kill people. Every year in the US more than 11,000 people are deprived of their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness when they are killed by gun violence. While no set of legislation will eliminate gun violence, the proposals I am supporting will likely significantly decrease it and save hundreds if not thousands of lives every year. Is the value of these saved lives not greater than the value of a little inconvenience of gun owners having to go thru a background check and some gun owners being disappointed about only being able to buy a regular rifle instead of an assault rifle. We have to decide where our priorities are as a society. Is it our higher priority to lessen the chances that our 6 year old son or daughter is killed by gun violence, or is it our higher priority that anyone in the US can own any military style weapon that they want.

I firmly believe that had there been an effective, no-loopholes, semiautomatic assault weapon ban and high capacity magazine ban in place in Connecticut then the Sandy Hook school tragedy would have been minimized if not avoided. Since the shooter's mother bought the weapons legally, if those specific choices had been illegal they would likely not have been purchased. And had the shooter entered the school with normal weapons he would not have been able to fire more than a hundred rounds of high-powered bullets in under three minutes into those 20 innocent children and the casualties would have been much less.

When wearing seat belts was made mandatory, some people complained about restricting their freedom of choice. When smoking was banned from restaurants and other public places, some shouted resistance. And when drunk-driving laws were toughened, some were shocked by the severity of the penalties. Yet all of these measures have saved thousands of lives and helped to change the mindset of our culture making it no longer acceptable to drive drunk and put the lives of others at risk. It is way beyond time for us to say as a culture that the safety and security of our children and the rights of each individual to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are our top priorities. It is way beyond time that we pass strong, comprehensive, common-sense gun violence legislation which protects the rights of good, law-abiding, safety-conscious gun owners, but makes it much harder for those bent towards violence to obtain guns and especially assault-type weapons which have been used in most of the recent mass killing sprees.

Sincerely,

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