

Public Hearing Date: January 30, 2013
Committee: Full Bipartisan Task Force
Location: Newtown High School
Re: Safer Gun Laws/Mental Health First Aid Act

My name is Christine Stowe. I am a mother of two daughters, ages 4 and 8. We reside in Newtown, CT. On the morning of December 14, 2013, I was volunteering at Trinity Day School where my four year old attends preschool. Just like all the other Newtown moms, I received that first call alerting us that there was an active shooting at one of the schools. The sound of police and emergency vehicles filled the air. I could not imagine that this was happening here. It did not seem real. There is no way to describe the feeling. My child came home that day, but others did not. I cannot imagine the anguish of those families. My child attends Hawley and did not have to experience the terror that those in Sandy Hook were forced to experience. Those survivors will be forever changed.

Was this preventable? I don't have that answer. Are there things we can do to try to prevent future tragedies like this? I believe the answer is yes. Our first step must be safer, rational gun laws. The second amendment gives us the right to bear arms so that we can protect ourselves. Its' intention was not to give a troubled person access to an assault rifle that they could take into an elementary school to massacre first graders and the staff there to teach them. The people in that school stood no chance against a man firing an assault rifle with so many rounds available to him. Our second step must be to address the troubled people of our communities. How we do that is a more difficult question. Prior to being a stay at home mom, I spent 10 years working in a hospital as a psychiatric social worker. I know that not all people with mental illness will become violent. I know that stigma, lack of knowledge, fear, and lack of available services prevent many from treating their illness in its early stages. I know that early intervention is key to successfully managing lifelong mental health issues. President Obama's Mental Health First Aid Act of 2013 (HR274) recommends training adults to first recognize the signs of mental health disorders in young people and then connect those in need with appropriate care. This can make a significant difference in the lives of those living with mental illness and those who may be impacted by their lack of appropriate treatment. This training needs to be made available to all teachers/school administrators, emergency services personnel, family members/caregivers, community leaders, faith community leaders, police officers, and primary care professionals. It is a step in the right direction.

We cannot let the violence continue. We must take action.
Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Christine Stowe, LCSW
Newtown, CT