

**Testimony to the Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Children’s Safety:
Gun Violence Prevention Working Group**

January 28, 2013

Senator Looney, Representative Miner, and distinguished members of the Gun Violence Prevention Working Group:

We applaud the efforts of the Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Children’s Safety, its three Working Groups, and the Task Force members’ appreciation of the link between mental health and gun violence issues.

Since the tragedy in Newtown, there has been much discussion about rates of gun violence in America. A recent report released by the Children’s Defense Fund highlights that:¹

- Nearly 6,000 children and teens died from guns in the years 2008-2009; a number greater than the number of U.S. military personnel killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan during the same time period; and
- The U.S. gun death rate for children and teens is nearly 65 times higher than the rates in the United Kingdom and Germany, and 108 times higher than in Spain.

The largest proportion of child and teen deaths by firearms has been homicide.¹ While mass shootings remain a relatively rare event, they nearly always involve the use of high-capacity ammunition magazines.²

We’d like to take this opportunity to highlight a less frequently discussed fact noted in the report -- more than one-quarter of the child and teen deaths by firearms were death by suicide.¹

The issue of child and teen suicide and gun control are intricately intertwined. In a study examining factors that distinguished adolescent suicide attempters from adolescent suicide completers – the availability of firearms was the single most important factor. Access to firearms resulted in a 35-fold increased risk of suicide completion.² An impulsive act of desperation becomes a permanent, irreversible tragedy when there is access to guns.

To prevent future senseless loss of life, we support:

1. A ban on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines;
2. Required background checks on anyone purchasing a gun;
3. Review of UK and Germany gun control laws; and
4. Strengthened support for children facing violence in their homes and communities, and for children with unmet mental health needs.

As has been discussed repeatedly in the media, individuals with mental illness are more likely to be dangerous to themselves than others, and individuals with serious mental illness are more likely to be the victim, than the perpetrator of a violent crime. The issues are complex, and we appreciate the Task Force’s multifaceted approach to addressing this issue.

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References

1. Protect Children, Not Guns. Children’s Defense Fund, 2012.
2. Mass Shooting Incidents in America (1984-2012). Citizens Crime Commission of New York City, <http://www.nycrimecommission.org/initiative1-shootings.php>.
3. Brent, DA et al., Arch Gen Psychiatry. 1988 Jun;45(6):581-8.