

Written Testimony on Gun Violence Prevention, School Safety, and Mental Health

I want to begin by saying that the gun lobby, including our own NSSF, is telling its constituents that we are all out to repeal the Second Amendment. There are extremists on both sides that shouldn't be taken seriously, and that is an extremist point of view. I am tired of hearing about the Second Amendment. I am tired of it being used as an excuse. The most conservative Supreme Court Justice, Justice Scalia, has said that it is NOT the right to carry any weapon in any way for any purpose, that there can and should be restrictions on gun ownership. Senator Murphy recently pointed out that the NRA was founded as an organization to improve soldiers' marksmanship, and for most of its history, it supported regulations on gun ownership. In light of all this, I do not understand why we are still talking about the Second Amendment, and I urge gun owners to please listen to what we are saying instead of jumping to erroneous conclusions about our intent. Our intent is to reduce gun violence while respecting our citizens' rights to defend their homes and families. It is in everyone's best interest for us to work together.

Regarding this right, while I fully support it, I do not understand why we need lethal force to protect ourselves. Why, when so many Americans are killed or wounded by gunfire, are we not aggressively pursuing effective, non-lethal methods of self-defense. If someone takes a round of rubber buckshot, they are probably not going to continue to attempt to mug you or invade your home. If we had the technology, Trayvon Martin could still be alive, as could the teenager that was mistaken by his father for an intruder and shot dead, as could the 7 year-old that was killed by his own father's gun when it accidentally discharged as he was leaving a gun shop. I keep hearing about responsible gun owners, but you are only responsible until you are not. Until you "forget" that your gun is loaded when you are demonstrating with it, as happened to a dealer at a gun show in the last week, and he shot himself in the palm. He could easily have shot and killed another person.

The NRA's claim that "the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun" is naïve and utterly at odds with reality. Even NYPD officers, when involved in gunfights, hit their target only 18% of the time. That means that 82% of the time, the bullets hit something, or someone, else. Furthermore, studies show that in a life-threatening situation, we do not respond the way we expect to respond. Our brain goes into survival mode, and often, we freeze up. At Gabby Giffords' event in Tucson, the "good guy with a gun" nearly mistakenly shot the person that took down the shooter! It is woefully unrealistic to expect a normal person, even a trained person, to react calmly and rationally in a life-threatening situation.

Since the CDC research was shut down by the NRA in the '90's when it found that American homes with guns were more likely to suffer murders and suicides than American homes without guns, we do not have a body of research to rely on when making recommendations for reducing gun violence. However, the gun lobby is positive that guns are not the problem, so why are they not supporting research that, presumably, would prove them right? If gun violence is entirely due to mental illness and violent video games and films, why isn't the NRA doing everything they can to ensure the mentally ill are identified and treated? Of course, that wouldn't have stopped Nehemiah Griego from killing 5 members of his own family in Albuquerque, as he had no history of mental illness. What he did have was access to his father's guns. Furthermore, British children play the same violent video games and watch the same Hollywood films as American

children, and yet British children are almost NEVER killed by gunfire, while 8 American children are every day.

I believe that most gun owners ARE responsible. But I am not willing to bet my children's life on the claim of one stranger, much less millions. I do not know if banning particular types of weapons will work, although Adam Lanza probably wouldn't have had access to an AR-15 if his mother hadn't been able to legally purchase one. What I do strongly believe is that there needs to be accountability. Background checks for all gun AND ammunition purchases. Follow-up on people that attempt to purchase guns or ammunition and FAIL a background check; that should be a red flag! I do believe there should be a waiting period to purchase a weapon, so that guns cannot be impulse buys. Annual licensing and registration should be implemented, and guns should be required to receive safety inspections. These are all applicable to our automobiles, so why shouldn't they be applicable to guns, which, unlike cars, are designed to kill? When someone is involved in a major traffic violation, like a DUI, they are arrested, may have their license suspended and even their car impounded. People that do not demonstrate responsible gun ownership should have the privilege revoked, at least temporarily, depending on the severity of the infraction. Gun owners whose guns are used in crimes should be as liable as the person who committed the crime, whether it be a family member, friend, or a criminal that obtained the gun through theft. Gun owners whose weapons are involved in accidents should be liable also. These are reasonable restrictions, and it will affect people that are irresponsible while not impacting those that are.

The gun lobby says that criminals will always find ways to obtain weapons. But criminals are inherently lazy, and studies have shown that increasing the difficulty of committing a crime, even marginally, significantly reduces the incidences of such crimes. Therefore, make it difficult to commit a gun crime, and the rate of gun crimes will drop.

Baby strollers, cars, toys, and other consumer products are subject to standards set by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. If a product under their jurisdiction so much as wounds a handful of people, the product is recalled by the millions at the expense of the manufacturer. Since guns are inherently dangerous, gun manufacturers should be responsible for making sure they are as safe as they could possibly be, and if a particular model of gun is found to be prone to accidental discharge, it should be recalled at the manufacturer's expense. The technology might not be there, yet, for things like password-protected gun locks, but with a little effort and ingenuity, it could be there very quickly. The NRA could offer a large reward (say \$1,000,000, which it can easily afford) to anyone that can invent this technology. I bet they would have it within a month.

The gun lobby likes to talk about how placing restrictions on gun ownership will impact the CT economy by eliminating jobs, but all the manufacturers need to do is adapt. Those that cannot adapt should go out of business; that is the way of nature, and the way of the world. Lego, another CT company, almost went under until they revamped their brand, and now they are more successful than they have ever been, and have added footage to their manufacturing facility in CT. Force them to shift their focus to gun safety products and non-lethal ammunition.

I will never support armed staff at schools, unless it be with non-lethal weapons. If arming

teachers and administrators with bullets becomes standard, I will send my kids back to private school. As Colin Goddard, a Virginia Tech survivor, said at the March on Washington on Saturday, you cannot tell an elementary teacher that it is easier to stand up to a shooter than it is to stand up to a lobbyist with a checkbook. I support video surveillance outside schools, advanced security systems, and police drive-bys, and I am happy for my taxes to be spent on those measures. A constant police presence only makes children fear for their safety, and they cannot learn, much less thrive, in that kind of environment. We should not have to live in a society where our children need armed guards.

My final suggestion is to look to existing gun control laws that work, such as those in Japan, Australia, Britain, and Canada. In both Britain and Japan, a person must demonstrate a valid need for a weapon. Perhaps we could take that approach with weapons that are not appropriate in most situations, such as assault weapons. If a person wishes to purchase an assault weapon, he must submit an application. If he lives and/or works in an area where gang violence is common, or works with criminals or ex-cons, or if he is disabled, perhaps those might be grounds for allowing possession of an assault weapon or large-capacity magazines. Another approach would be to require that assault weapons do not leave the home.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Killin
Newtown, CT