

The wounds of Sandy Hook are raw and deep. The streets of Chicago and other cities erupt with senseless shootings nearly every day. While the causes and effects of these events may differ, we need to finally address the epidemic of gun violence – and the culture of guns – that our country has created.

I realize this is a complicated problem with no easy answers, and that we will never achieve a perfect solution. But we should be measuring any progress in this area by the number of lives we can save – whether it is one, 100 or 100,000. Addressing social ills, mental health issues, violence in video games and the media all need to be addressed -- but none of these things shoot people. Guns do.

Our state is home to people who hunt for recreation as well as people who keep handguns for protection. We are home to gun manufacturers that pay taxes and create jobs. But tragically, we are also home to a massacre whose victims were mostly six and seven year olds.

In spite of this complex landscape, we need to take measures that will begin to reverse the epidemic. In my mind, this means:

- Enacting tougher gun laws that make ownership of assault weapons and high capacity clips illegal
- Better enforcement of background checks and gun licensing
- Stiffer penalties for illegal gun possession and selling
- More funding for mental health screening and services
- More mental health professionals in our schools
- Engaging the medical community and our religious leaders to make gun violence a part of the discussions they have with their patients and congregations

I am confident that in the wake of Sandy Hook, the voices of people looking for solutions to this problem will not be silenced. I am especially heartened by the efforts of people like Gabby Gifford and Mark Kelly, as well as James Baker III and John Dingle (whose Op Ed appeared in today's New York Times) – all gun owners who understand that the need for better legislation and enforcement of gun laws are desperately needed – and that these measures do not threaten second amendment rights.

We owe it to the victims of Sandy Hook, Aurora, Virginia Tech and Columbine – and to the thousands of people killed and maimed by guns every year – to ensure real change this time around.

Thank you.

Laura Williamson