

Dear Members of the Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety,

My name is Lisa Sheridan. I currently teach math at Newtown High School and I am also a resident who lives in the Sandy Hook borough of Newtown, CT. I was not able to be at the public hearing, but I would like to submit this personal testimony.

In 1997 I was teaching at Henry Abbott Technical High School in Danbury, CT. At the end of one day as the students were getting on the buses, I witnessed a student get stabbed. It was the final event of a series that had made me feel unsafe in my position, and within a few weeks I had switched careers and was working as a computer programmer.

In 2004, my oldest child entered Sandy Hook Elementary. By this time I had been a stay-at-home mom for five years. Sandy Hook Elementary School was as welcoming to parents as the sign at the end of the driveway declared. I was able to be in the classroom with my daughter as a helping parent. By the time my other daughter entered the school two years later, I was active on the PTA along with continuing to help out in the school. Sandy Hook School felt very much like my school as well as my daughters'. I was so impressed with the teachers and staff. They created an environment for the students that academically challenged them while at the same time was so welcoming and caring. It made me long to go back into teaching, something I never thought I would do.

During the summer of 2008 I looked online to see if I could work part-time in the school. I found a part-time position at the high school teaching math. Sandy Hook School's principal at the time, Donna Page, whom I admire greatly, wrote my letter of reference. I was so excited to get the job. Newtown High School has proven to be as academically challenging yet welcoming as Sandy Hook School. I truly have been blessed to have found this job. Most importantly, this was a safe community. Bad things didn't happen here. I would not see a student stabbed.

When we got the announcement to go into lockdown on December 14, we knew right away that it was not a drill. We grabbed students from the hallway, locked the door, covered it with black construction paper, closed the blinds, turned off the computer monitors, and sat in a line on the floor against the wall out of the direct line of fire, like we have practiced over and over again for years. The classroom I was in was at the end of the hallway, closest to the road. We sat in the dark and in silence. We heard the sirens. The sirens were unrelenting, and they were obviously very close. We heard the helicopters. They were right overhead and we could tell they were circling. All we heard for two hours were sirens and helicopters. I thought that this was it; there

was someone with a gun in our school because, of course, it would be the high school. I sat on the floor in the dark with four other educators and our students, some of us crying, listening to only sirens and helicopters, and I have never been so scared in my life.

I could never have imagined what had really happened, that there was a gunman, but he wasn't at the high school, instead at the elementary school so close to us.

This is a safe community. I love my neighbors, my co-workers, my daughters' friends, their families, and my students. I have never felt threatened in all my time here. Students live in my neighborhood, students know where I live, and I give my students my cell phone number. I cannot stress with you enough how very safe I feel living here. Or how I did. Because I no longer feel safe. My husband is also a high school teacher, and every day at some point I find myself scared that this will be the day something happens to one of us, or ever worse, one of our kids. Every day since the 14th I have broken down at one point because I cannot believe this happened. Every single day. I tell you this because I really feel like if it could happen here, it can happen anywhere.

We need to make some changes to make sure this never happens again. My friend, Mary Ann Jacob, said it best, "Something needs to change. We need to be able to send our kids to school without fear. We need to help our children who have mental illness. We need to remove violent video games from the hands of our children. We need to ensure that gunmen cannot get into our buildings. Make no mistake, if there was a police officer in the building that day, he'd be dead. Adam Lanza didn't knock on the door and ask for permission to come in. . . . Nobody needs a gun that kills 26 people and shoots hundreds of rounds of ammunition in three minutes. Licensing, background checks must be provided. We need to provide mental health services for our children, so they don't shoot their mothers four times in the face while they are in bed."

My colleague, Tom Swetts, also spoke to you. He spoke of how some students with mental illness need more help than the public schools can offer them, but how the public can't afford those high costs. Tom told you how because of privacy rules, teachers often don't know why kids have accommodations, only that we must accommodate them. Teachers need to be able to teach. Students that need mental health assistance need to have access to it. Our schools need to be safe places for our kids to go. Like Tom, I will not carry a gun. I am a teacher – I love my students and I could never shoot one. I know I would not be able to pull that trigger. Teachers need to be able to teach, we need to be safe, we need to know our kids are getting what they need to graduate into the world and be productive human beings. We need to help our students so that they grow up and help out the next generation.

We need to change the culture of violence that devours violent video games and movies and that sends the media in droves to cover violent events. We need to stop listening to how our political parties are telling us we should feel about an issue and instead have rational discussions. We need to stop blaming the other side. We need to make a change, and we need to do it now.

Because of my part-time status, I drive into work as the elementary kids are waiting at their bus stop. At one house in particular, there was a little girl who was always jumping or twirling with her little sister, and I always saw mom with a smile on her face. It gave me joy every day to see this little girl. On December 15th I drove past that house, and there was a police car in the driveway. I already knew what that meant, because I cannot leave my house without passing one or more of those houses that had police cars parked in their driveways, and it broke my heart. Every day when I drive past that house, it breaks me.

Two days ago I found out that that little girl was Allison Wyatt. I did not know Allison, but I will never forget her. I don't want you to forget her either. I don't want you to forget Allison, Charlotte, Daniel, Rachel, Olivia, Joey, Ana, Dylan, Dawn, Madeline, Catherine, Chase, Jesse, James, Grace, Anne Marie, Emilie, Jack, Noah, Caroline, Jessica, Avielle, Lauren, Mary, Victoria, or Benjamin. I want them to be the last victims of a school shooting. Ever.

Thank you for working together to make this change.

Lisa Sheridan

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