

Good afternoon, Task Force Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Medha Thomas. I live in Westport, Connecticut, with my husband and two children, a six year-old girl and two year-old boy.

I am speaking today as not just a mom and one of your constituents but as founder of a parenting organization housing over 8,000 local parents, the founder of The Enough Campaign and a volunteer for the March for Change. I urge you to pass the legislation proposed by Connecticut Against Gun Violence.

We are all beyond heartbroken at the loss of 20 precious children and of the six heroic teachers and administrators who were victims of the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary. This senseless massacre is only one of an unconscionable number of recent mass murders committed by mentally disturbed people who had easy access to assault weapons fed by high capacity magazine clips.

The proliferation of these lethal weapons -- easily available even to people with a criminal background or a history of mental disturbance -- was the essential, necessary component in these mass murders. We may not be able to determine which criminals or which mental illnesses lead to mass murder but we can be absolutely certain that military-grade assault weapons are tools that kills, and that no civilian should have the right to possess them. Guns are the second leading cause of death among young people in America, far outpacing deaths from cancer, heart disease, infections, or any other medical cause. Among all the leading nations of the world, only the United States has such a criminal record. We must take bold action to reduce these senseless deaths and to protect our children!

We understand and respect the Second Amendment and the right to possess firearms used in a reasonable manner, whether for hunting, self-protection, or sport shooting. But military-grade guns and magazine clips belong in the military and law enforcement, not among America's civilian people. Hunters and other responsible firearm owners -- indeed many members of the NRA -- support bans on assault weapons and high capacity magazine clips and favor mandatory registration, permit, and universal background check requirements.

The "no grandfathering" provisions of Connecticut Against Gun Violence's proposed legislation are absolutely critical to making the proposed gun safety measures a success. I would suggest tax deductions for returning banned weapons to compensate for owners' economic loss, and reasonable rather than draconian penalties for violation. But lethal assault weapons and high capacity magazine clips must be kept out of Connecticut.

I hug my children tight each morning as I send them off to school, still

grieving for the families in Newtown, knowing that I will do everything in my power to protect my own and our nation's children. They are counting on me, and I am counting on you.

Please follow your legal and moral imperative to respond to the Newtown tragedy with courage, hope, and bold action. Put the safety of our children and of the public first by passing Connecticut Against Gun Violence's proposed legislation.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.