

I am planning on attending the hearing at Newtown High School tomorrow, January 30th, 2013, but in the event that I do not get an opportunity to speak I would like to submit the following testimony From Ryan Knapp, 11 Jeremiah Road, Sandy Hook, CT. 06482

Testimony as follows:

As a Sandy Hook Elementary School alumni, Sandy Hook resident and friend to one of the victims, I urge you to please refocus your attention from firearms legislation and towards mental health. When President Obama came to the High School in my town and met with the families of the victims, he promised an all encompassing approach to preventing future mass murders. Firearms legislation addresses "how" the shootings at my old school occurred, but little legislation has been proposed that addresses the "why" in the scenario. Blaming firearms is a superficial and ineffective way of dealing with the fear we are collectively feeling through reactionary legislation. What scares me more is that this is superseding talk about getting treatment for potential mass murderers. Even in a hypothetical situation where all guns were removed from existence, these deranged people would still be out there with the same issues left to find other ways to manifest their impulses in other ways: arson, bombings, poisonings, etc. I am terrified of mass murderers, not of firearms.

What should be more telling than the fact that the Sandy Hook shooter used an AR type rifle, is the fact that this happened just over a mile from Fairfield Hills, a former State Mental Hospital that had programs to treat the likes of the Sandy Hook shooter. The State cut funding to this hospital and disseminated its patients amongst the general population. This was the type of hospital where the shooter in town could have gotten 24 hour supervision and treatment.

In a story from The Newtown Bee, ran in October of 2012, former 30 year employee of Fairfield Hills and RN Donna Bowe discussed the adolescent unit and what happened to the patients who were removed from its care. I urge you to read the excerpt below:

[The last four years that she worked at Fairfield State Hospital, until it was closed in 1995, Ms Bowe worked with the adolescent unit. "It was a wonderful place, with a wonderful staff. A lot of the young people were there for depression, or because they were trying to hurt themselves," she said. She considers the adolescent program to have been highly successful. "I still see some of my patients around, and they're doing well now," she said.

Closing Fairfield State Hospital was the "grand idea" of the state, said Ms Bowe. "The plan was to close Fairfield Hills, and have the patients in area communities in supervised group homes. That worked for some, but not everyone. So where did they go?" Some became homeless, she said, and others turned to crime, or became violent and ended up at Garner Prison. "A lot of our patients who had relied on the drug and alcohol program ended up in jail. Why," she wondered, "did it have to be all or nothing? Why did it have to either be open or closed, with no happy medium?" Even one building left to assist people who really could not get by on their own would have helped, she said.

"But for my experience, I was very lucky to work where I did and to work with the people I did," said Ms Bowe. "I'm very proud of what we did there." ]

Again, this is the type of program that the Sandy Hook shooter should have been in, but the state cut it. Federal privacy laws protected the shooter from being institutionalized against his wishes. The way things work, one essentially has to, in writing, say that they are a threat to themselves or others to receive any psychological treatment they don't volunteer for once they are beyond the age of 18. That means that the shooter's mother could have carried the shooter on her insurance until he was 26, but had no say in the treatment she was paying for.

I am concerned we have created a culture that goes beyond dismissing people with these issues and goes as far as to develop these types of people. I think we are setting children up to have problems. Children are developing social issues and lack of interpersonal skills because texting has replaced conversation. Social media has all but eliminated privacy which makes people much less likely to admit their problems, such as mental health issues or face ridicule and cyber bullying which is worse because there is no accountability. It also puts undue pressure on people because they constantly feel as though they are being compared to their peers. Television has been giving people unrealistic expectations about life and how to get ahead. Instilling a desire to be in the spotlight and seek attention in young people. Violent video games and movies teach young adults that shoot outs are exciting. We set kids (the shooter was 20) for dramatic falls and when their worlds are so small, it's easy to shatter it.

My biggest frustration is that treating these people has become taboo in our culture of political correctness and now, when pressed, we are avoiding the much more difficult topics in favor of vilifying the tools used in this particular mass murder with layers of convoluted and admittedly unenforceable legislation.

I am a resident of Sandy Hook. I am terrified of the mentally ill amongst us who go untreated and plot to carry out future mass murders. Rather than address how to find and treat those people, our elected officials seem determined to take away my means of defending myself from said mass murders. Sandy Hook is now in the spotlight and would be an easy target for a copycat.

Hopefully your task force, which has admirable intentions, can advise legislators to ask the tough questions about preventing future shootings by identifying and treating these people. No one seems to want to deal with these issues which should be at the crux of the debate. Firearms legislation is merely going to make criminals out of responsible gun owners. Rather than adding layers of new legislation, we should focus on enforcing existing legislation.

Thank you very much,

-Ryan W. Knapp