

Dear Sir or Madam,

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend today's hearing in Hartford as I have three school age children and no cover from them. I did want to write however, to let you know my views on the issue of gun control.

I have been living in the United States for almost 4 years now, having relocated here to Wilton, CT from the Surrey, in the UK. We are very happy here, very settled, and in fact have just taken the big step of selling our house in the UK and buying one here. Life, overall, is good here; we have more space, better weather, the schools that my children go to are fantastic. We couldn't be happier - apart from the gun culture.

When I think of my kids growing up and going through the usual ups and downs of being a teenager, I worry. I hope that we will keep them level and stable - we are dedicated parents, I'm a stay at home mum, I hope to always be there for my kids. But I know those teenage years can be turbulent times, and I know there are some kids whose parents maybe aren't around so much, maybe missing vital signs - kids being bullied, kids becoming fascinated with guns and ammunition. I find it absolutely terrifying when I think how easily a hormone besieged teen can lay their hands on a gun.

During the tail end of last year, gun violence impacted my family on 3 occasions: a domestic dispute in the town that I live in, the shooting and killing of my son's violin teacher in another domestic dispute, and, of course, the horrendous events of December 14th in Newtown. How very different the news might have been if no guns had been involved.

I understand peoples' 2nd amendment arguments. I appreciate that it would be asking too much in this country to journey to a place where there are no guns - or at least, where they are only held by Police officers and the military. However, the NRA's position of encouraging more and more people to become armed in order to defeat people with guns terrifies me. Didn't we try this during the Cold War? Is this a situation where one side can "win"? Surely in a country with as many gun related deaths as we have here in the States no one is winning.

I was a University student in the UK in 1996 at the time of the Dunblane massacre (a gunman entered a primary school in Scotland and killed 16 small children and their teacher). The response of the Government (at the time a right wing, Conservative government), was to enact legislation to criminalize private possession of most hand guns over 0.22 calibre. Most semi automatic long-barrelled weapons were already banned.

In the UK we still have plenty of farmers and landowners who hold firearms. They do so for legitimate reasons - to protect their livestock from predators such as foxes, etc. We also have plenty of people who enjoy shooting as a sport. What we also have are strict licensing laws. People seeking a firearm or shotgun certificate must be able to demonstrate a good reason for having the gun - such as being a member of a shooting club. The license can be revoked if the reason ceases to exist. Guns have to be stored "securely at all times" which in practice is usually in a locked steel cabinet rawbolted to the wall. Members of the gun owners family are not allowed to access the gun. People can be spot checked - and if their gun isn't being stored securely, their license can be revoked.

People are not allowed to carry loaded guns in public places (and that includes if the gun takes a magazine that you carry along with you), and no one with a criminal record is allowed a firearm - ever if the term of imprisonment was more than 3 years, and for 5 years if less.

How nice in the UK to feel free to shout at someone who's cut across your lane on the motorway without fear they might retaliate with a gun. How nice to be an angst ridden teenager but not to be able to ruin your life by losing control of your emotions and shooting someone.

More guns is not the answer in this country. There are statistics everywhere that prove that the more guns there are, the more death by guns. I am fully aware there were plenty of other issues at play in Newtown; obviously mental health support needs to be addressed to. But the fact remains that the prevalence of guns in this society means that so many crimes become lethal crimes, and so many families lives are left in tatters as a result.

Please support legislation to tighten gun laws. Please make it harder for criminals and mentally unstable people to gain access to these lethal weapons. Please make it harder for fathers to accidentally kill their kids, or for teenage boys to commit suicide with a gun, or for kids to kill each other by accident when playing with the family gun.

I worry that if something isn't done now, we will find ourselves in a terrifying situation in the future, where no one feels safe without a gun, no one trusts anyone, and life resembles some awful science fiction movie.

Please act now to make sure the future looks brighter for future generations.

Yours faithfully

Sarah Beach