



Good evening Chairpersons and members of the Special Task Force Gun Violence Prevention Working Group. My name is Sarah Raskin and I am a neuropsychologist and Professor at Trinity College. My work involves research into ways to improve the lives of people with brain injury. I see everyday the interplay of guns and mental illness and I see how it is a constant feedback loop that must be changed. I would like to submit testimony in favor of greater safety regulations on gun ownership and use.

Since receiving my doctorate I have slowly seen services for people with brain injury dwindle. In my first position the average stay for a person after a traumatic brain injury was six months. The latest data suggest that it is now 20 days for acute care and 30 days for rehabilitation care. The vast majority are sent home with no further treatment. The severity of impact of these injuries has not changed.

According to a 2008 CDC study, 82.8 percent of male prisoners in Minnesota reported having had one or more brain injury over the course of their lifetime. A 1986 study showed that every death row inmate in the country had sustained a serious brain injury before committing their crime. Brain injury is the leading cause of death and

disability for American youth with over 500,000 school-aged kids sustaining a brain injury each year. However, according to the federal Department of Education, there are less than 24,000 students nationwide receiving any additional support due to a brain injury.

Our children are falling through the cracks and ending up on the streets, killing themselves, or even worse, killing innocent people and then landing on Death Row.

But, on the other hand, how are these brain injuries occurring? Within the past two decades, violence related deaths have surpassed motor vehicles crashes as the leading cause of brain injury related death. Firearm related incidents account for 40% of brain injury related deaths while motor vehicle crashes accounted for 34% of fatalities and falls about 10%.

What has caused this change? Researchers believe this may be due to improved safety measures decreasing the incidence of motor vehicle crashes and falls as violence related deaths have been more stable. Gun advocates like to argue that cars cause more injuries than guns. Well, that is slowly changing. Why? Because we require a license to drive a car, a safety test, insurance and registration for all cars. They must pass safety tests, too. And the license and registration must be regularly renewed. And cars have a purpose other than harming or killing. Guns have no other such purpose.

So, let's do the same with guns. Let's require registration of handguns with an annual renewal, require a permit or license to purchase or carry a gun and require universal background checks on all guns. And, please, please there is no reason for anyone to have a large capacity ammunition magazine of more than 7 rounds and we need to apply the "one military feature" provision to define assault weapons.

I want to close with the story of a young man, Jim, I had the pleasure to work with over several years. He lived in a neighborhood where guns were prevalent. He explained to me that virtually all of these guns were purchased at gun shows or from individuals via the internet legally. One night while taking a walk with his children a stray bullet hit him. This bullet was fired by someone who thought he was just "fooling around." It left Jim paralyzed from the waist down and with a brain injury that effected his judgment and made him impulsive. Jim went through many months of physical rehabilitation and slowly, painfully returned home to his wife and children. Now Jim was fast in his wheelchair, very fast. But people in wheelchairs are easy to victimize and very often the targets of violence, seen as easy prey. He told me he could outrun anyone with a knife but he could not outrun a bullet. And so, he made the unfortunate decision, that he needed his own gun to protect himself. He hollowed out the seat cushion of his

wheelchair to make a space so that he could always have a gun on him. I explained to him that a gun is 6 times more likely to be used to hurt a family member or friend than a stranger or intruder but he was scared. He became more depressed about living in fear all the time- surrounded by people with guns. He stopped coming to treatment when his insurance ran out. We stayed in touch via telephone. Then one day his sister called me. He and his wife had had a fight. He had shot her. Her life was over. He was in custody, his life, was essentially over. His children's lives would never be the same. He was clear, as was I, that any other weapon would not have lead to this tragic outcome. One brief moment of poor judgment changed everything.

I ask you to please make Connecticut a place that people like Jim and his wife can live safely.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah A. Raskin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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