

I wrote this as I sat in the auditorium and delivered most of it at the microphone in the last half hour of the forum. Like the majority of the others, my estimation of what could be said in the allotted time was overreaching. Here is the typed version of the testimony I scrawled on the back of a scrap paper, including what I did not say because I ran over time, in case it is helpful. - Erin Nikitchyuk

I am Erin Nikitchyuk, Sandy Hook Mom. We moved to Newtown 8½ years ago when my son was mere weeks old. He is now a Sandy Hook School student and was in the hallway by the office with the shooter on that day. I have daughters in the High School and Middle School who both attended Sandy Hook School.

Society failed Adam Lanza. In turn, he failed our community.

The causes are many and the problems are complex.

My pro-gun friends say there will always be “crazies” and nothing can be done about that. I choose not to be so helpless and cynical on my outlook or my expectations.

The status quo is not “OK.” I refuse to believe that arming myself against it with weapons is the best solution.

Tonight you’ve heard about guns – both for and against. You’ve heard pleas to consider mental illness issues; about violent video games; the impact of media; and school security; and you’ve heard calls to reinstate character lessons in our school and society.

I know you were listening. I watched your faces. I saw you take notes.

I am not here to rehash the many good points made tonight.

We can’t eliminate violence, but we need to make efforts to reduce it and diffuse rage in our society.

Even freedom of speech is regulated. We can preserve rights AND make progress to a better safer world. Even small changes can make a significant difference.

I am here to say, “YOU are my leaders.” I did not vote every one of you into office, but you are my voice. You are the voice of the other “me”s too.

Other leaders and the whole world are watching YOU right now. I am watching you.

- Lead us through your actions towards a culture of civility and cooperation.
- Listen to our voices. Listen to each other.
- Choose your words wisely. Avoid trigger words. Talk about gun violence, not gun control. The wrong words immediately polarize and entrench.
- Investigate facts over rhetoric. Challenge what you hear. THINK... hard and deeply and “out of the box.” Educate yourself on the issues.
- Talk to each other and find common ground. In this very room tonight we can see that we are not diametrically opposed. Nearly all the gun rights advocates in this room agreed that some (or specific) regulations are appropriate and needed. Those of us asking for tighter regulations are not demanding categorical removal of guns from our society. There *IS* common ground and room for compromise.
- Look at gun laws as a whole. Make coordinated, common sense legislation and ENFORCE it.

I have put my faith in you to make educated, fair, reasonable decisions. I trust you to do what is right.

My voice has to be louder than special interest money. You are my voice. You are the voice of many. Be strong.

Through your actions, you can start the shift away from the “all-or-none” partisan “my-way-or-the-highway” mentality. YOU can change the political culture that is polarizing people and crippling our nation in so very many ways.

Lead by example. Show Washington how it’s done.

Model effective political action for other states and localities to emulate. I believe our local government in Newtown has already shown that we can do it. Follow their lead.

I ask you to work purposely to honor everything we lost on December 14th – the lives, the carefree childhoods, the emotional well-being, the sense of security and freedom. Honor it with your behavior as you work through this daunting challenge to make the world a better place. Make the promise.

Your steps are my steps. Your steps are loud and reverberating... they will echo in the world. Every deliberate move you make is one step closer to a culture of kindness and a safer world.

Use my voice. Be my leader. Make me proud. Thank you.

And, as a mom, especially this late at night and as tired as I see you are, I appreciate each and every one of you traveling to be with me here. Thank you. With children to care for, it is not feasible for me to travel to you. I appreciate that you value my voice in the debate and facilitate my participation in facing these important issues.