

Good Evening,

As a Connecticut resident stunned and devastated by the tragedy at Sandy Hook, but also as an American citizen and human being, I am growing increasingly alarmed, worried, and saddened by the escalating mass violence linked to people possibly suffering from some type of dangerous mental illness or social dysfunction. Improving access to health care is extremely important, but equally important is finding a better way to DETECT mental illness issues early on and then providing proper care and supervised treatment as required. I'm wondering what types of discussions are taking place and what plans are being made to put truly meaningful and effective measures in place to identify burgeoning mental illness early on and get people properly treated before loss of life occurs. Everyone has rights, and mental health is a very sensitive issue, but the right to live and feel safe in our public places and communities, and our children's rights to be safe at school, must be a top priority that is fiercely protected above anything else. At what point do rights get prioritized? With that in mind, are any of the following measures being discussed and seriously considered by the Mental Health Services Working Group in an effort to make real and effective change?:

1. Implementing some type of required psychological/mental health assessment during the school years (as part of attending public school) to help identify mental illness early on and provide the necessary services or help needed before any issues escalate.
2. Providing mandatory training of school staff and personnel (teachers, staff, coaches, etc) to identify the signs of mental illness or troubled behavior along with requiring such personnel to report any suspicions, similar to the way they are required to report suspicion of physical abuse. This critical step must not be left solely in the hands a family member to report; there are many reasons why that alone may not always be effective.
3. Implementing programs within schools that allow fellow students to confidentially report suspicious or potentially threatening activity, behavior, or discussions among other classmates.
4. Providing regular funding to schools to have counselors on site and put outreach programs in place to help those suffering and dealing with anger or social issues.

Additionally, should the law that protects the mental health status of known violent offenders and murders be looked at and possibly amended or repealed, especially if that person is no longer living? Should someone who murders and is also suspected of suffering a mental illness be allowed to maintain the privilege of having their mental status be protected, especially if the crime can be linked to such mental illness? Couldn't we learn something from having these records be made available to try to prevent future tragedies or crimes? Couldn't that information be useful in gaining both knowledge and leverage in putting more protective measures in place to keep innocent people safe? Why are the rights of these criminals protected, even after death, when people's right to live has been taken away by this same person?

Thank you for your serious and thoughtful consideration. I hear so much talk about gun control, yet so little talk about standard and objective ways to identify mental illness coupled with providing accessible and effective treatment. I look forward to hearing more public discussion and seeing actions taken to address these important mental health issues.

