

Dear Governor Malloy and State Legislation,

As people who have direct, live experience with mental illness and addiction, as family members caring for our loved ones with these illnesses, as counselors and healthcare workers, and as leaders of behavioral health programs, we all call on you, the leaders of our State to begin with us a road to recovery from these tragedies.

We grieve for the Innocents murdered in Newtown. These are our children, our neighbors, our families, our friends. There can be no greater tragedy in society than losing its young, its own future, so needlessly and so senselessly. Such actions strike at the very heart of who we are and who we hope to become.

So we must grieve. We grieve for the families who lost their children, for the families of their teachers, who were killed, for the entire Newtown community, and for America itself. Yet, we owe them all much, much more than just our tears. They also deserve our action to identify and implement solutions. To begin our recovery, we recommend that you provide State assistance to:

Immediately double the capacity of public mental health and substance abuse programs.

Funding for community mental health and substance use treatment services has been cut dramatically. As a result, only a third of those with moderate mental illness and two thirds of those with severe illness ever receive any care. Families simply cannot get badly needed care. The Affordable Care Act must be implemented fully, and mental health and substance use care must be fully integrated into good medical care.

Immediately implement school and community-based programs to promote mental health, to prevent mental illness and substance abuse, and to provide early interventions for those exhibiting these conditions.

Prevention and early intervention strategies can strengthen children's mental health and resiliency, prevent or lessen the burden of illness, and help them and their families to recover from trauma. Further, teachers must be taught how to identify troubled children and to guide them into effective supports before these children get into trouble.

Immediately begin teaching students at all levels to recognize the signs of mental illness and addiction, and to seek help when needed. Few young people get even a single hour of education about mental illness or addiction, its signs or its treatment. We can't expect people to step forward or to seek help for a family member when we don't even provide them the rudimentary tools to do so. We must begin to do so.

Immediately ban assault rifles and large capacity clips. Possession of these weapons is a fundamental public health problem. They are designed for the battlefield, not our closets. They are used to kill people senselessly and needlessly. In Newtown, an assault weapon was used to kill 20 young children just starting their and 6 of their heroic teachers. Enough!

Yes, we must grieve for the Innocents, just as we grieved recently for those lost in Tucson, Aurora, and Portland. But, this time, our grieving must have a direction and purpose to galvanize action. As people who know first-hand the tragedies of mental illness and addiction, and the triumphs that are possible, we all call on you to take immediate action.

Our Nation and State expects nothing less of all of us.

Sincerely,

Mark L. Kraus, MD, FASAM
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Executive Committee Member and Board Member

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