

Dear U.S. Senator,

The undersigned organizations urge the U.S. Senate to act in concert with the science community to address the public health crisis of gun violence and save lives. Since the start of 2022, less than half a year, the U.S. has already recorded 233 mass shootings. The toll of gun violence is far greater, of course: The Gun Violence Archive counts 18,196 deaths due to gun violence in 2022, including murder, suicide and accidental death. Gun violence should be considered a public health issue, not a political one—an epidemic that needs to be addressed with research and evidence-based strategies that will reduce morbidity and mortality.

Firearms are now the leading cause of death for children in the United States.¹ Suicide is the second leading cause of death for individuals 10 to 34 years old, and a significant number of attempts use guns (over half of all suicide fatalities across lifespan).² Death is only part of the toll of gun violence. Over 15,000 have been injured by gun violence so far this year, and far more have been traumatized by their own or others' experiences.

A large majority of adults in the United States experience stress associated with mass shootings, and a third of U.S. adults say that fear of mass shootings stops them from going to certain places and events.³ Moreover, research indicates that many survivors of these events experience posttraumatic stress symptoms, depression, and other psychological symptoms.⁴ Other studies have found that, after previous mass shootings, youth felt less safe and more fearful.⁵ These findings make it urgent to take action to prevent these shootings.

We strongly discourage the use of inaccurate and harmful rhetoric that blames America's gun violence problem solely on mental illness. The great majority of those with mental illness are not violent, and in fact, are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators of it.⁶ U.S. rates of mental illness are comparable to those of other developed countries, which do not have the same incidence of gun violence.⁷ The answer to our gun violence problem must not further stigmatize people with mental illnesses.

Reducing the incidence of gun violence will require interventions through multiple systems, including legal, public health, public safety, community, and health. Increasing the availability of data and funding

¹ Goldstick, Jason E., Cunningham, Rebecca M., Carter, Patrick M. Current Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States. 2022/04/20. New England Journal of Medicine, 386: 1955-1956. 10.1056/NEJMc220176. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2201761>.

² <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide>

³ American Psychological Association (APA) (2019). One-Third of US Adults Say Fear of Mass Shootings Prevents Them from Going to Certain Places or Events. Retrieved from: <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2019/08/fear-mass-shooting>

⁴ Risk and Resilience Factors After Disaster and Mass Violence. National Center for PTSD. https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/disaster_risk_resilience.asp

⁵ For a description of relevant research see: Lowe SR, Galea S. The Mental Health Consequences of Mass Shootings. Trauma Violence Abuse. 2017 Jan;18(1):62-82. doi: 10.1177/1524838015591572. Epub 2015 Jun 17. PMID: 26084284.

⁶ Baumann ML, Teasdale B. Severe mental illness and firearm access: Is violence really the danger? Int J Law Psychiatry. 2018 Jan-Feb;56:44-49. doi: 10.1016/j.ijlp.2017.11.003. Epub 2017 Dec 7. PMID: 29701598.

⁷ Grinshteyn E, Hemenway D. Violent death rates: the US compared with other high-income OECD countries, 2010. Am J Med. 2016;129(3):266-273.

will help inform and evaluate policies designed to reduce gun violence. Congress needs to take action to enhance our nation's mental health systems, but in order to curb this public health emergency, it is vital we also enact gun violence prevention policies. Our scientific community stands ready to be resource as Congress considers new measures to help prevent the senseless tragedies impacting our communities.

Signed,