



Senator Dick Durbin
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

July 27, 2022

K-12 Organizations Urge Congress to Reinstate a Strengthened Federal Assault Weapons Ban to Protect Students & Families

Dear Chair Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley:

We thank you for holding the hearing on Wednesday, July 20, 2022 “After the Highland Park Attack: Protecting Our Communities from Mass Shootings” and submit this letter as a statement for the record.

As the leading national education organizations committed to building safe learning environments and ensuring that every child can grow and reach their full potential, we strongly urge Congress to reinstate a strengthened federal assault weapons ban as quickly as possible. For the first time, firearms are now the leading cause of death for children under the age of 19.¹[Click here to enter text.](#)

We have witnessed in horror as these weapons have been deployed against educators and children learning at school, against families exercising their right to worship, against seniors shopping, and against communities celebrating, such as the recent tragedy in Highland Park, Illinois. In the aftermath, we work to rebuild communities that are shattered, comfort children haunted by fear and memory, and carry those families whose children will now never have the

opportunity to grow into adults or who may live with the trauma of bearing witness to or being injured in violent events involving an assault weapon, let alone a firearm.

Make no mistake, assault weapons serve no purpose of sport or personal protection. These weapons of war were specially designed for military use to inflict extreme widespread damage, and they do not belong in the hands of civilians.

Gun violence prevention advocates have called for increased restrictions on civilian access to military style weapons of war for decades. Congressional inaction has resulted in countless and entirely preventable tragedies including the school shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas; the racially motivated shooting in Buffalo, NY; and the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. In each of these instances a teenager legally purchased a military style assault weapon to carry out these horrific acts of violence.

We believe that every student deserves to learn and grow in an environment that is safe. But we are at a crisis point. According to a recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, “the United States is alone among peer nations in the number of child firearm deaths. In no other similarly large or wealthy country are firearm deaths in the top 4 causes of mortality let alone the number 1 cause of death among children.”ⁱⁱ It is urgent that families, educators, school district leaders, community leaders and elected officials work together to prevent violence in schools and ensure that all students have a safe environment in which to thrive and learn.

The original assault weapons ban that sunset in 2004 was passed on a bipartisan basis by Congress as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 with the support of law enforcement and colleagues from across the aisle. Then and today, the majority of Americans -- Republicans and Democrats – continue to support common sense gun safety measures such as limiting access to military-style weapons.ⁱⁱⁱ Research demonstrates that gun laws that restrict access to high-powered weapons that are capable of mass destruction in a short period of time reduce gun related deaths.^{iv} Multiple empirical studies demonstrate a significant rise in mass shootings following the expiration of the ban,^v and state laws limiting magazine size are associated with a nearly 50% reduction in fatal mass shootings.^{vi}

We strongly urge Congress to protect students and families from weapons of war by reinstating the federal assault weapons ban. No one should fear for their life by simply going to school or going about their daily lives. Together, we can build a safe learning environment where every child has the opportunity to grow and reach their full potential.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or would like to discuss further with us, please contact Kate Clabaugh, National Parent Teacher Association Director of Government Affairs, at kclabaugh@pta.org.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Federation of School Administrators
American School Counselor Association
National Association of School Psychologists
National Education Association
National Parent Teacher Association

ⁱ See Underlying Cause of Death, Age 1-18, 2020, Search Results. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved July 19, 2022. <https://wonder.cdc.gov/controller/saved/D76/D292F153>. See also Goldstick, Jason E., Cunningham, Rebecca M. & Carter, Patrick M. "Current Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States." The New England Journal of Medicine. April 20, 2022. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2201761>.

ⁱⁱ See McGough, Matt, Amin, Krutika, Panchal, Nirmita and Cox, Cynthia "Child and Teen Firearm Mortality in the U.S. and Peer Countries." Kaiser Family Foundation. July 8, 2022. <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/issue-brief/child-and-teen-firearm-mortality-in-the-u-s-and-peer-countries/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Schaeffer, Katherine. "Key facts about Americans and guns." Pew Research Center. Sept. 13, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/09/13/key-facts-about-americans-and-guns/>. See also Durkee, Alison. "Support For Gun Control Laws Hits Record High, Poll Finds." Forbes. June 15, 2022. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alisondurkee/2022/06/15/support-for-gun-control-laws-hits-record-high-poll-finds/>.

^{iv} See "Gun Violence and Youth [Research summary]." National Association of School Psychologists. 2019. <https://www.nasponline.org/x54359.xml>.

^v See DiMaggio C, Avraham J, Berry C, Bukur M, Feldman J, Klein M, Shah N, Tandon M, Frangos S. "Changes in US mass shooting deaths associated with the 1994-2004 federal assault weapons ban: Analysis of open-source data." The Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery. 2019. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30188421/>.

^{vi} See Webster DW, McCourt AD, Crifasi CK, Booty MD, Stuart EA. "Evidence concerning the regulation of firearms design, sale, and carrying on fatal mass shootings in the United States." Criminology & Public Policy. Jan 30, 2020. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1745-9133.12487>.