

Oral Testimony

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Before the U.S. House of Representatives Gun Violence Prevention Task Force

Wednesday, September 18, 2019

Chairman Thompson, Vice Chairs, and all members of the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today and for the Task Force's leadership since 2012 to push for legislative action to reduce gun violence in our country. I am here today on behalf of National PTA, the nation's oldest and largest child advocacy association, with members in all 50 states, DC, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and Europe.

No parent should fear for the safety of their child every time they leave home for school or anywhere else and no child should live in fear every day wondering if this is the last day they will see their family. Since 2013 there have been 471 incidents of gunfire on school grounds. Thousands of children across the country have been victims of, or witnesses to gun violence in their homes, schools, or communities. At PTA, we have issued so many statements on mass shootings at schools over the years that we now keep a draft on hand at all times. In every statement, we remind the nation that our students deserve to have a safe environment in which to thrive and learn. In every statement, we urge Congress to do more. Now is time to act. Doing nothing is unacceptable.

This August I published an op-ed asking Congress to return from its summer recess to enact common-sense proposals, such as passing red flag laws, universal background checks, funding for gun violence research, and banning assault weapons—all of which a majority of Americans support. Unfortunately, Congress did not return to DC this summer to address this epidemic, so here I am today, asking again for change on behalf of children and families.

Universal background checks can and will save lives. This common-sense measure would have saved seven lives and prevented injuries to 25 people in my hometown of Odessa, Texas. It would have prevented traumatic injuries to Anderson, the 17-month-old daughter of our family's assistant pastor at church, Kelby. Anderson is a toddler. The only pain she should know should be from scraped knees while learning to walk.

Instead, little Anderson was shot through her bottom lip and tongue and lost all of her front teeth because a man was able to purchase a semi-automatic rifle thanks to a loophole in our federal gun laws.

Kelby was just going about her typical Saturday afternoon errands, when Anderson was shot in the backseat of their family car. As a mother and grandmother myself, I can't imagine the fear

she felt in that moment as her daughter was shot and her other child sat, horrified, in the backseat next to her. Every mother knows that primal instinct to protect your children. Kelby did everything she could to protect her twin daughters—but there was nothing she could have done to prevent her baby from being shot by a man who should have never had a gun in the first place.

I've heard the argument that no matter what you do, or what laws that you put in place there will be those that will break them. I get it. I do. You could make that argument about speed limits, people break them every day. But does that mean we shouldn't have them? No. They prevent accidents. They save lives. We need speed limits, just like we need universal background checks.

The question I'm asking today is, do our elected officials, including our President, value our nation's children and families enough to put a law in place that protects them the best that it can, or will they continue to do nothing?

To be clear—National PTA is not about taking away an individual's Second Amendment right. What we are about is ensuring there are laws that eliminate the current background check loophole for gun shows and private and online sales. My husband was a police officer in Texas and every member of my family is a gun owner. Gun ownership is not the issue here, the issue is the ease of access to firearms and assault weapons, especially for those who pose a danger to themselves and others.

Our association is appreciative of the House's passage of H.R. 8—which our association endorses.

Now, it's the Senate's turn to act. Last week, I urged Senate Majority Leader McConnell to bring S. 42 to the floor and facilitate its passage in the Senate, to address our nation's gun violence epidemic and protect America's children and families.

Today is a day for action. The Senate needs to pass and the president must sign this bill as a reasonable first step to addressing gun violence in this country.

Thank you for this opportunity and I look forward to answering any questions members may have.