

Senator Dick Durbin
Chairman
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

National PTA Calls on Congress to Restore a Federal Assault Weapons Ban and Pass Legislation Prohibiting Older Youth from Purchasing Military-Style Weapons (S. 4278, H.R. 3015)

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley:

On behalf of the National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA), we thank the Senate Judiciary Committee for holding the hearing on Wednesday, July 20, 2022 titled “After the Highland Park Attack: Protecting Our Communities from Mass Shootings” and allowing our senior leadership to be in the room during the hearing. We are submitting this letter as a statement for the record in support of the Assault Weapons Ban (S. 736, H.R. 1808) and related legislation such as the Age 21 Act (S. 4278) and the Raise the Age Act (H.R. 3015).

National PTA represents millions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders across all 50 states, Washington D.C., the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and DoDEA schools in Europe. Our members are committed to making every child’s potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

As the nation's oldest and largest child advocacy association, National PTA has a rich history of advocating for the safety of children and youth. Our association is committed to federal efforts to protect children and youth from gun violence and strongly believes that Congress must immediately enact legislation to prevent future firearm tragedies from occurring while still preserving the lawful use of firearms for sport and personal protection.

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.”ⁱ It is urgent that families, educators, school district leaders, community leaders and elected officials work together to prevent violence in our schools and communities.

In the interest of building safe learning environments and ensuring that every child has the opportunity to grow and reach their full potential, our association seeks to restore the federal ban on assault weapons. 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. 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.

The original federal 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 continue to support common sense gun safety measures such as limiting access to military-style weapons.ⁱⁱ 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.ⁱⁱⁱ Multiple empirical studies demonstrate a significant rise in mass shootings following the expiration of the ban,^{iv} and state laws limiting magazine size are associated with a nearly 50% reduction in fatal mass shootings.^v

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 an older youth legally purchased a military style assault weapon to carry out these horrific acts of violence.

At the very least, our association believes we must pass legislation preventing children and teenagers from accessing dangerous weapons in the home, by supporting safe storage training and education and by raising the legal minimum age to purchase military-style weapons, handguns, shot guns and rifles from any type of dealer to 21. For example, legislation like the Age 21 Act (S. 4278) would increase the minimum age from 18 to 21 for purchasing certain military-style assault weapons and high capacity magazines from a federally licensed gun dealer. The private transfer of certain military-style assault weapons, high capacity magazines, and handguns would also be limited to those who are age 21 or older. As such, the Age 21 Act (S. 4278) promises to make it harder for firearms to land in the wrong hands while our nation concurrently faces a youth mental health crisis.


For these reasons, we encourage your support for restoring the federal assault weapons ban and passing legislation prohibiting older youth from purchasing military-style weapons such as the Age 21 Act (S. 4278) and the Raise the Age Act (H.R. 3015). While the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act makes some necessary improvements to existing gun laws, we must not stop there. No parent should fear for the safety of their child every time they leave home. It's up to all of us—community members, parents, educators and other child well-being advocates—to work together to prevent gun violence. Our children deserve a world that is safe, where they can learn, and grow, and reach their potential without threat of violence or trauma.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation, and please feel free to contact our Director of Government Affairs, Kate Clabaugh, at kclabaugh@pta.org if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you to support negotiations around the federal assault weapons ban moving forward and to make every child's potential a reality through meaningful federal policy change.

Sincerely,



Anna King
President
National PTA



Nathan R. Monell, CAE
Executive Director
National PTA

ⁱ See McGough, Matt, Amin, Krutika, Panchal, Nirmitta 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/>.

ⁱⁱ 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/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ See “Gun Violence and Youth [Research summary].” National Association of School Psychologists. 2019. <https://www.nasponline.org/x54359.xml>.

^{iv} 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/>.

^v 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>.