PTA urges the 118th Congress to pass legislation that:

- Supports sensible solutions to gun violence, including promoting the safe and secure storage of firearms, strengthening the federal background check system, investing in evidence-based community violence interventions and addressing youth access to firearms, especially assault or military-style weapons.

- Promotes the inclusion of safety education in the curriculum at all levels of public schools and incorporates an age-appropriate violence prevention component into existing courses of study.

- Enhances the physical safety of school buildings, addresses environmental health hazards and invests in disaster preparedness through emergency planning, infrastructure improvements and physical security measures without undermining the school environment or causing psychological harm through trainings, lock downs or responses to false threats of violence, also known as “swatting.”

- Prioritizes restorative justice, positive school discipline and alternative dispute resolution techniques over the detention, exclusion or incarceration of youth, including providing training for school personnel on safe de-escalation techniques, trauma-informed care and positive behavioral interventions and supports, while intentionally eliminating any discipline practices that may historically or currently target youth of color and contribute to a school-to-prison pipeline.

- Fosters the development of full-service community schools, strengthens community partnerships and encourages the adoption of a whole-child approach that responds to the mental, physical, behavioral, developmental and academic needs of all students.

2023 PTA
LEGISLATIVE ASK:
SCHOOL SAFETY AND GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Because students and educators have a right to attend schools that are safe and conducive to learning!

PTA takes action
2023 PTA LEGISLATIVE ASK: SCHOOL SAFETY AND GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Issue Overview

No parent should fear for the safety of their child every time they leave home. But all too often, young lives are destroyed or changed forever due to gun violence and other forms of violence in the places our children should be the most safe—their communities. More must be done immediately to protect our nation’s most vulnerable population. It’s up to all of us—community members, parents, educators and other child well-being advocates—to work together to prevent gun violence. That’s why PTA members advocate, year after year, for sensible gun safety and violence prevention policies that will help keep children safe and sound.

School safety is a critical priority for all parents, educators, students and community members. Students and educators have a right to attend schools that are safe and conducive to learning and achievement, yet schools often experience critical incidents such as suicide, natural disasters or a mass casualty event that can have a devastating impact and long-term harm on whole school communities.

A person’s exposure to gun violence and other traumatic events in childhood significantly impacts their mental and physical health through adulthood, including being at increased likelihood of abusing drugs and alcohol, suffering from depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder, failing or having difficulties in school and becoming involved in the justice system. Violence, especially by firearm, not only directly impacts individual children, but whole families and whole school communities.

- Nearly half of all parents with a weapon in the home wrongly believe their children don’t know where a gun is stored. Guns used in about 68% of gun-related incidents at schools were taken from the home, a friend or a relative.
- Active shooter drills are implemented in over 95% of American K–12 schools today.
- Approximately 3 million American children witness gun violence every year, including the students and families affected by the 875 incidents of gunfire on school grounds that have been recorded in America since 2013.
- Children exposed to violence, crime and abuse are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol; suffer from depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder; fail or have difficulties in school and engage in criminal activity.
- The American Psychological Association reports that about half of children in the United States experience a traumatic event in childhood, and many of these events happen at school.

PTA’s Recommendations

PTA recognizes that school safety is a multi-faceted issue with no one clear solution for each community. We support efforts to address school and community safety that involve all stakeholders, especially students, parents and families and urge consideration of a variety of factors including the physical and...
psychological safety of students while maintaining a positive school climate for all children to learn, grow and reach their potential. The time is long overdue for Congress to adopt measures that ensure our children are protected from harm and support schools in their efforts to create safe and welcoming spaces for every child to enhance development, growth and safety for all of our nation’s students.

PTA urges members of Congress to:

- Co-sponsor the Age 21 Act (S. 14) and the Assault Weapons Ban (S. 25)
- Reintroduce and co-sponsor the Safe Gun Storage Act
- Reintroduce and co-sponsor the School Shooting Safety and Preparedness Act
- Reintroduce and co-sponsor the Handle with Care Act
- Join the Senate Gun Violence Prevention Caucus and the House Gun Violence Prevention Task Force
- Reintroduce and co-sponsor the Bipartisan Background Checks Act (H.R.715) and Background Check Expansion Act

Age 21 Act 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, as well as limit the private transfer of certain military-style assault weapons, high-capacity magazines and handguns to those who are age 21 or older.

Assault Weapons Ban would make it a crime to knowingly import, sell, manufacture, transfer or possess a semiautomatic assault weapon (SAW) or large capacity ammunition feeding device (LCAFD) and would authorize funding to compensate individuals who surrender a SAW or LCAFD under a buy-back program.

Safe Gun Storage Act would direct the Consumer Product Safety Commission to establish safety standards for firearm locks and safes to prevent unintentional discharge of firearms and unauthorized access.

School Shooting Safety and Preparedness Act would be the first federal legislation to provide parents and families with an annual, comprehensive understanding of indicators of school crime and safety across the nation, including data highlighting the effectiveness of different security and safety measures undertaken by schools to prevent and address school shootings.

Bipartisan Background Checks Act and Background Check Expansion Act would strengthen the national background check system for purchasing firearms to make it harder for firearms to land in the wrong hands.

Handle with Care Act would provide grants for schools to establish “handle with care” programs that connect children who have faced domestic violence or substance use-related trauma in the home with school resources designed to provide the child with trauma-informed care and support. Such programs would include providing evidence-based training on trauma-informed care to school staff and support collaboration between families, law enforcement, school-based mental health professionals and other community providers to create trauma-informed schools.

Senate Gun Violence Prevention Caucus is a newly established group of Senators committed to gun violence prevention who meet regularly to discuss and pursue gun safety legislation together.

House Gun Violence Prevention Task Force is a bipartisan group of lawmakers working to find common-sense solutions to reduce gun violence, established after the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

Questions?
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