

September 5, 2019

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

We the undersigned seven medical and public health societies representing 731,000 physician members and 25,000 public health professionals write to urge you to take immediate and comprehensive action to address the public health epidemic of firearm-related injuries and deaths when Congress returns from August recess.

In 2017, a total of 39,773 people died in the United States as a result of firearm-related injuries.¹ The population-adjusted rates of these deaths are among the highest worldwide and are by far the highest among high-income countries.² Firearm-related deaths now exceed motor vehicle-related deaths in the United States.³ Despite these sobering statistics, Congress has not enacted meaningful policies to reduce the toll of firearm violence that we see each day with our patients. The recent mass shootings in Gilroy, CA, El Paso, TX, Dayton, OH, and Midland and Odessa, TX instantiate the current crisis of firearm violence and the federal policy action it necessitates.

In August, our organizations issued a [Call to Action](#) urging an array of policy reforms to improve the U.S. response to these unacceptable levels of firearm-related injuries and deaths. As you return from recess, we write to urge you to enact three critical and common-sense policies already under consideration in Congress that would create major progress in reducing the toll of firearm violence on the patients for whom our members care. These policies include: 1) appropriating \$50 million through the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations legislation for public health research on firearm morbidity and mortality prevention; 2) enacting legislation requiring universal background checks, such as H.R. 8; and 3) enacting legislation that allows the removal of firearms from those deemed potentially harmful to themselves or others through the issuance of extreme risk protection orders (ERPO), such as H.R. 1236/S. 506.

Fund Public Health Research on Firearm Morbidity and Mortality Prevention

As medical and public health organizations, we recognize the essential role of public health research in determining how best to mitigate an epidemic like firearm-related injuries and deaths. This approach works; robust research on motor vehicle crashes and subsequent legislation has helped save hundreds of thousands of lives through public health interventions, including seat

belts and other safety features. The same approach can help reduce gun violence in our communities. We are grateful that the U.S. House of Representatives has approved \$50 million for this research to be conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health through the FY 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. We urge Congress to appropriate \$50 million for this research in any final FY 2020 appropriations legislation.

Enact Comprehensive Universal Background Checks Legislation

Current federal policy requires background checks for firearm sales by federally licensed firearms dealers. This is a public health intervention that works; since federal enactment of this policy in 1994, it has prevented over 3 million people legally prohibited from possessing a firearm from obtaining one.⁴ Unfortunately, this policy does not currently apply to private firearm sales, such as those conducted at gun shows and via the Internet. This dangerous loophole enables individuals who are not legally allowed to possess firearms to purchase them, putting our patients and communities at risk. The U.S. House of Representatives has passed bipartisan legislation, the *Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019* (H.R. 8), which would close these loopholes by applying background checks to all firearm sales and most firearm transfers. We urge Congress to enact universal background check legislation without delay.

Enact Comprehensive ERPO Legislation

Extreme risk protection orders (ERPO) allow family members or law enforcement to petition a judge to temporarily remove a firearm from a person deemed at risk of harming themselves or others. Seventeen states and the District of Columbia have laws authorizing courts to issue an ERPO. The *Extreme Risk Protection Order Act of 2019* (H.R. 1236/S. 506), which has bipartisan support in the U.S. House of Representatives, would provide grants to states and other jurisdictions that have enacted ERPO laws, using a thoughtful approach that does not stigmatize individuals with mental illness. We urge Congress to enact such ERPO legislation without delay.

Conclusion

Congress has an important opportunity to take decisive action that can prevent both mass shootings and the daily firearm violence that traumatize communities. We call on you to enact these important policies upon returning from recess. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to our organizations.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Physicians
American College of Surgeons
American Medical Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Public Health Association

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Underlying cause of death, 1999-2017. WONDER database. December 2018. Accessed at <https://wonder.cdc.gov/controller/saved/D76/D48F344> on 29 August 2019.

² Grinshteyn E, Hemenway D. Violent death rates: the US compared with other high-income OECD countries, 2010. *Am J Med.* 2016;129:266-73. [PMID: 26551975] doi:10.1016/j.amjmed.2015.10.025

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Injury Prevention & Control: Data & Statistics (WISQARS). Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2014. Accessed at www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html on 29 August 2019.

⁴ Karberg JC, Frandsen RJ, Durso JM. Background Checks for Firearm Transfers, 2015 - Statistical Tables. US Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics (2017). Accessed at <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/bcft15st.pdf> on 29 August 2019.