

January 8, 2013

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 U.S. Capitol
Washington DC, 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner and Representative Pelosi:

The undersigned medical organizations, together representing the vast majority of practicing physicians and medical students in the United States, share the nation's grief and sadness over the recent tragic school shootings in Connecticut. As physicians, we see first-hand the devastating consequences of gun violence to victims and their families. We offer our experience and expertise in finding workable, common sense solutions to reduce the epidemic of gun violence—indeed the overall culture of violence—in America. We also urge the nation to strengthen its commitment and resources to comprehensive access to mental health services, including screening, prevention, and treatment.

The investigation into the Connecticut shootings is still continuing, and the issues surrounding such violence are often complex and can vary significantly from case to case. Strategies for preventing gun-related tragedies must also be complex and carefully considered. The relatively easy access to the increased firepower of assault weapons, semi-automatic firearms, high-capacity magazines, and high-velocity ammunition heightens the risk of multiple gunshot wounds and severe penetrating trauma, resulting in more critical injuries and deaths. Even for those who manage to survive gun violence involving these weapons, the severity and lasting impact of their wounds, disabilities and treatment leads to devastating consequences for families affected and society, and contributes to high medical costs for treatment and recovery. Renewing and strengthening the assault weapons ban, including banning high-capacity magazines, would be a step in the right direction.

Many of the deaths and injuries resulting from firearms are preventable. More resources are needed for safety education programs that promote more responsible use and storage of firearms. Physicians need to be able to have frank discussions with their patients and parents of patients about firearm safety issues and risks to help them safeguard their families from accidents. While the overwhelming majority of patients with mental illness are not violent, physicians and other health professionals must be trained to respond to those who have a mental illness that might make them more prone to commit violence. Funding needs to be available for increased research on violence prevention in general, and on the epidemiology of gun-related injuries and deaths in particular, as well as to implement available evidence-based interventions. Of equal importance is providing sufficient access to mental health services. While we strongly supported the passage of the Mental Health Parity Act of 2008, unfortunately, the promise of better access to

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psychiatric treatment will not be a reality absent requisite federal and state funding. This effort should be combined with an education campaign that reduces the stigma of seeking mental health services.

Newtown, Connecticut has now been added to the sad litany of recent mass shootings, including Columbine, Virginia Tech, Fort Hood, Arizona, and Aurora. As we come together as a nation to mourn the most recent victims of senseless gun violence, we must make a real and lasting commitment to work together on meaningful solutions to prevent future tragedies. We stand ready to work with Congress and the Administration to make progress in protecting our communities, especially our children, from this epidemic of violence.

Sincerely,

American Medical Association
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pain Medicine
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Academy of Urgent Care Medicine
American College of Emergency Physicians
American College of Mohs Surgery
American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine
American College of Osteopathic Internists
American College of Phlebology
American College of Physicians
American College of Preventive Medicine
American College of Radiology
American College of Surgeons
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Geriatrics Society
American Osteopathic Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Society for Clinical Pathology
American Society of Plastic Surgeons
Association of American Medical Colleges
College of American Pathologists
North American Spine Society
Renal Physicians Association
Society of Critical Care Medicine
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons

California Medical Association
Colorado Medical Society
Connecticut State Medical Society
Medical Society of Delaware
Medical Society of the District of Columbia
Illinois State Medical Society
Maine Medical Association
MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society
Massachusetts Medical Society
Michigan State Medical Society
Minnesota Medical Association
Nebraska Medical Association
Nevada State Medical Association
Medical Society of New Jersey
New Mexico Medical Society
Oklahoma State Medical Association
Oregon Medical Association
Rhode Island Medical Society
South Dakota State Medical Association
Tennessee Medical Association
Texas Medical Association
Vermont Medical Society
Medical Society of Virginia
Washington State Medical Association
Wisconsin Medical Society