

January 8, 2013

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-221 U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Republican Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-230 U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Reid and Senator McConnell:

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

The Honorable Harry Reid  
The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
January 8, 2013

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