



November 27, 2023

Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the National Education Association's 3 million members and the 50 million students they teach and support in public schools and colleges, we submit these comments for the record for the Judiciary Committee's November 28 hearing, "The Gun Violence Epidemic: A Public Health Crisis."

The National League of Cities defines a public health crisis as anything that "impedes individuals and communities from being healthy" and limits our "ability to live well and thrive." The nation's epidemic of gun violence clearly fits that definition. Virtually no place in America is safe from gun violence. Mass shootings have occurred in many of the places we gather, from schools and colleges to grocery stores, places of worship, banks, concerts, and parades. Besides massacres that make the headlines, students and educators must cope with the alarmingly frequent shootings that occur in neighborhoods and communities of all descriptions. Whether or not our children are the victims of gun violence, they are left with the pain and trauma from them as America lurches from one shooting to the next. This continual exposure robs them of childhood and denies them a secure foundation for learning and development.

According to the Pew Research Center, the number of children and teenagers killed by gunfire in the U.S. [increased by 50 percent between 2019 and 2021](#). Since 2020, [the leading cause of death for children and teenagers has been guns](#). Our answer to this public health crisis should be doing all we can to prevent gun violence, not simply reacting to its aftermath.

To that end, it is not enough to force students to endure active shooter drills, which can have the effect of further traumatizing them. Arming educators, who entered the profession to teach and nurture and not to act as armed guards and first responders, is also not the answer. We are a nation that stands up to terror around the world; surely, these "solutions" are not the best we can do to stand up to terror in our own communities.

We ask you to support trauma-informed responses to gun violence by focusing on measures to protect and enhance the mental health and well-being of students and educators. We ask you to pass the commonsense gun laws that are favored by most Americans, including more than 70 percent of gun owners, according to a study by the bipartisan gun safety organization called [97Percent](#). These include requiring background checks on all gun sales and banning assault weapons. In addition, as you look to various approaches to making schools and campuses safer, we ask you not only to reject arming educators, but also to oppose school-hardening measures that will heighten anxiety rather than cultivate the nurturing environments students need.

We applaud you for recognizing that America's gun violence epidemic is a public health crisis. Please *treat* it as a crisis by coming together to pass laws that will turn the tide and grant students and educators the security they deserve.

Sincerely,

Marc Egan  
Director of Government Relations  
National Education Association