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Press Release

Americans Against Gun Violence Responds to California Veterans Home Shooting

Sacramento, California, March 11, 2018: Americans Against Gun Violence extends heartfelt sympathy to the families, friends, and colleagues of Christine Loeber, Jennifer Golick, and Jennifer Gonzales Shusheba, who were shot and killed on Friday, March 9, by a former client who took them hostage at a home for veterans with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Yountville, California.¹ The three women worked as executive director, clinical director, and staff psychologist, respectively, at the home.

The shooter, Albert Wong, who apparently shot and killed himself after murdering the three women, was reported to be a decorated veteran of the U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. He was described by a former Army colleague as, "Hands down, the best soldier we had,"² and by a former foster parent as, "A fine young man."³

The mass shooting at the Yountville veterans home was a "small one," by US standards. In fact, it would not even qualify as a mass shooting by some definitions, which require that there be at least four victims, not including the perpetrator.⁴ The shooting obviously has an enormous adverse effect, however, on the lives of the victims, on everyone who knew and loved them, and on the community that they served.

At the same time that we extend our sincere sympathy to all those affected by the shooting, we wish to emphasize that the regular occurrence of such tragedies, which has become the norm in the United States, is preventable, and that expressions of sympathy are not nearly enough. As the late Senator Thomas Dodd of Connecticut stated in 1968:

"Pious condolences will no longer suffice. Quarter measures and half measures will no longer suffice. The time has now come that we must adopt stringent gun control legislation comparable to the legislation in force in virtually every civilized country in the world."⁵

California has some of the strongest gun control measures in the United States,⁶ and the rate of gun related deaths in California is about 30% lower than the national average.⁷ But the rate of gun related deaths in California is much higher than in any other high income democratic country of the world.⁸ For example, the rate of gun related deaths in California is 8.5 times higher than in Australia and 35.8 times higher than in Great Britain.

While California's gun control laws may be among the strongest in the United States, they would not qualify as even "quarter measures" or "half measures" in any other high income democratic country. Contrary to the laws in other high income democratic countries, no

one in California (or in the rest of the United States) needs to show a good reason for having a gun before acquiring one. Instead, to deny a gun purchase, the government must show that the individual meets certain limited criteria for being prohibited from owning a gun, and suffering from PTSD is not one of these criteria. Furthermore, recognizing that there is no net protective value from owning or carrying a gun, most other democratic societies do not accept “self-protection” as a legitimate reason for having a firearm.

In order to prevent future mass shootings, and in order to reduce the extraordinarily high daily number of gun related deaths and injuries in California and the rest of the United States, we must adopt definitive gun control laws comparable to the laws that have long been in place in Australia, Great Britain, and every other high income democratic country of the world. Such laws include stringent regulation, if not complete bans, on civilian ownership of handguns and all automatic and semi-automatic rifles. Until we adopt such laws, we should not be surprised when the next horrific mass shooting occurs.

¹ Ellen Knickmeyer and Amy Forliti, “Vet in California Attack Had Trouble after Return from War,” AP News, March 11, 2018, <https://apnews.com/23eed2a4c7ef41eea7c9092259c9adb24/Army-vet-gunned-down-women-who-devoted-lives-to-veterans>.

² Ed Fletcher, “Friends of Yountville Shooter Describe His Military Life, Civilian Struggles,” *The Sacramento Bee*, March 10, 2018, <http://www.sacbee.com/news/local/article204514079.html>.

³ Knickmeyer and Forliti, “Vet in California Attack Had Trouble after Return from War.”

⁴ Callum Borchers, “Analysis | The Squishy Definition of ‘Mass Shooting’ Complicates Media Coverage,” *Washington Post*, October 4, 2017, sec. The Fix Analysis Analysis Interpretation of the news based on evidence, including data, as well as anticipating how events might unfold based on past events, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/10/04/the-squishy-definition-of-mass-shooting-complicates-media-coverage/>.

⁵ Thomas Dodd, “Text of Speech by Senator Thomas Dodd on Floor of U.S. Senate: The Sickness of Violence and the Need for Gun Control Legislation” (Office of Senator Thomas Dodd, June 11, 1968), http://thedoddcenter.uconn.edu/asc/research/gun_control.htm#; Thomas Dodd, “Press Release: Pious Condolences Will No Longer Suffice” (Office of Senator Thomas Dodd, June 10, 1968), http://thedoddcenter.uconn.edu/asc/research/gun_control.htm#.

⁶ Amber Phillips, “California Has the Nation’s Strictest Gun Laws. Here Are the Other Strictest and Loosest States.,” *Washington Post*, December 4, 2015, sec. The Fix, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/04/california-has-the-nations-strictest-gun-laws-here-are-the-other-strictest-and-loosest-states/>.

⁷ “Fatal Injury Data | WISQARS | Injury Center | CDC,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed September 11, 2016, <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal.html>.

⁸ “Gun Law and Policy: Firearms and Armed Violence, Country by Country,” GunPolicy.org, accessed December 3, 2017, <http://www.gunpolicy.org/>.