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**2019 National High School Essay Contest  
\$1,000 Award Winner**

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**The Lethal Toy That's About to Take Down America**

America is divided, in chaos. Within this chaos, bullets fly freely and frequently. Citizens and the government alike are desperately searching for a cure to the epidemic of mass shootings taking place almost every day, but when an answer emerges, they refuse to listen. In Canada, Australia, and the UK it took one major shooting to spark gun reform laws. (1) There have now been over 50 mass shootings since the national tragedy of Columbine, and the United States still refuses to follow the example of these improved countries. (2) The Second Amendment to the United States Constitution has become an excuse for citizens to claim a deadly freedom. "The right to bear arms" is the only part of the Amendment mentioned anymore, and people are disregarding the entire first half of the Amendment, including the crucial phrase, "A well regulated militia." (3)

It's safe to say that America has changed since 1791 when there was no National Guard and when anti-federalists feared that the U.S. Constitution would create a federal government as tyrannical as the British rule that it was replacing. The Second Amendment was proposed, in part, to calm the fears of anti-federalists and also to provide a mechanism whereby well regulated state militias might preclude the need for a standing army. Both of these reasons for the creation of the Second Amendment are obsolete in today's America.

In the 1980 case of *Lewis v. United States*, Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun wrote in the majority opinion that "The Second Amendment guarantees no right to keep and bear a firearm that does not have 'some reasonable relationship to the preservation or efficiency of a well regulated militia,'" meaning the amendment is now being twisted to fit the wants of trigger happy individuals. (3) Likewise, the Amendment specifically uses

the words “well regulated,” implying an organized group. Under this phrase, one individual doesn’t qualify to carry a gun around the streets.

People need to realize that while there are, of course, individuals who will cause trouble no matter what laws are created, making guns harder to get will still drastically decrease the frequency of shootings. Australia is the perfect example of how stricter gun laws translate into public safety. After a devastating shooting in 1996, the country intensely strengthened its gun control laws, and since then, they have experienced zero mass shootings. (4) That’s right, zero. Given that the shooters in the United States from Parkland, Mandalay Bay, Pulse nightclub, Sutherland Springs, and Thousand Oaks all acquired their firearms completely legally, it can be concluded that the current lax U.S. gun laws are part of the problem. (5)

Under federal law, U.S. residents can buy a gun within minutes, in most cases, if they’re not listed as being prohibited from owning a firearm on the National Instant Criminal Background Check System. (6) The ease with which people can purchase guns has resulted in there being an estimated 393 million civilian owned guns in circulation, more than one gun for every man, woman, and child in the country.(7)

I refuse to be the next victim of a mass shooting. I refuse to allow the misinformed to continue allowing potentially dangerous people to purchase guns with ease. I refuse to let this great country spiral into death and disaster because of lethal toys. Every single person with the knowledge to create safer gun laws needs to speak up and be the voice for the innocent lives lost to such pointless violence.

#### References

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