



Americans Against Gun Violence
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**2020 National High School Essay Contest
\$1,000 Winner**

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This Is Not A Drill: Addressing The Gun Violence Issue In America

Run. Hide. Fight. Year after year, teachers instruct their students about what to do in the event of an active shooting, conditioning students to create a plan on how to make it out of school without gunshot wounds. In each of my classrooms, I know which cabinets I can fit in, the objects I can throw, and the routes I can run to avoid being gunned down. However, gun violence does not just plague schools. A ban on handguns and assault weapons is the most effective way to reduce firearm-related injuries from suicide, domestic violence, and a child getting access to a gun.

The United States leads the modern world in medical innovation, technology, entrepreneurship and, ironically, in rates of gun-related deaths. Each year nearly 40,000 American civilians are killed with guns and two to three times that many Americans suffer non-fatal but often life-altering gunshot wounds (Centers). In order to address these horrendous numbers, some states have enacted limited gun control laws that have been somewhat effective. In fact, states with the strictest gun control laws in the country report the fewest numbers of gun-related deaths and injuries. But even in the states with the strictest gun control laws by U.S. standards, guns are far more readily available than in other advanced democratic countries, and rates of gun-related deaths and injuries are far higher than in those other countries (GunPolicy.org).

Easy access to firearms is especially dangerous for the most vulnerable American citizens: those with mental health issues. Having access to a gun triples the risk of suicide and unfortunately, those who survive are left with a life of debilitating injuries. Katie Stubblefield shot herself in the face when she was 18 years old and survived. However, the bullet destroyed the structure of her face and she underwent a face transplant that stripped her identity away. A lethal device that creates a permanent solution for a temporary problem should never be put in the hands of anyone.

Further, domestic violence coupled with access to a firearm makes perpetrators lethal. Guns enable the abuser to exert power over their victim and escalate violent interactions quickly. Today, 1 million women have reported that their partner shot at them and another 4.5 million reported that they were threatened with a gun (Susan). When an abusive

person has access to a gun, their partner is 5 times more likely to be shot. It is clear that current background checks do not catch these abusive individuals and the only way to prevent them from gaining access to firearms is to implement a ban.

Finally, so many children's lives are significantly altered because they stumbled upon a firearm that they should never have had access to. Often proper storage of a firearm is not enough as 3 out of 4 children who live in a house with a gun know where it is located (McCarthy). The only way to prevent a young child from accidentally shooting themselves is to not have a gun in the house. The same logic applies to every group of people. The absence of guns diminishes the amount of injury and death that occurs.

We pride ourselves in being world leaders in our ability to meet challenges and solve problems, as when we put a man on the moon and invented the world-wide-web. In locking down nearly our entire country in response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, we've also shown that we're willing to follow the examples of other countries in responding to crisis situations. If we can do these things, we should be more than capable of ending the gun violence epidemic in our country, not by inventing some new technology, but by following the examples of the other advanced democratic countries of the world and adopting stringent gun control laws, including the bans on handguns and assault weapons that the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended two decades ago.

References

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