



Americans Against Gun Violence
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2021 National High School Essay Contest
Second Place Winner
\$2,500 Award

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Untitled

Sandy Hook was supposed to be the crisis that set this country on the track to take tangible, concrete action to address the epidemic of gun violence that takes so many lives each year. On December 14, 2012, 28 lives were unnecessarily taken due to the lethality of a single weapon. The rest of America watched on our phones and televisions as journalists descended on Newtown, Connecticut and the families of the victims went home with a tremendous hole in their hearts that would alter the course of their lives forever. Since Sandy Hook, a generation has grown up all while the promises of gun control have gone unfulfilled. Lockdown drills are almost as synonymous as homework is with school in America for Gen Z.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, many of America's youth are struggling with mental health as a result of the forced isolation. Our worries of gun violence at school or elsewhere dissipated as we constructed an artificial semblance of safety within the tranquility of our homes. However, even with a global pandemic, the epidemic of gun violence never stopped; it just fell off the headlines. Whatever artificial semblance of safety that we had shattered with the January 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. First, it was a demonstration on the Capitol steps. Then it became a violent attack on what we have constantly learned in history class as the citadel of American democracy. With many of the insurrectionists carrying flags with taunts below images of the same kind of assault rifle used in the Sandy Hook massacre, the threat of gun violence that we experience every day in our schools and our neighborhoods had finally reached the institution that had failed for decades to take action to stop it.

It was in the same U.S. Capitol when Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut, which contains Sandy Hook, filibustered the Senate for 14 hours to demand Congress take action on the gun violence epidemic. Even after 20 first graders were massacred at Sandy Hook elementary school, though, Congress failed to take any action to prevent similar tragedies from recurring in the future. Despite the filibuster and subsequent failure of Congress to act then, the gun violence epidemic did not take a pause even if our politicians did. Gun violence still affects communities of every kind in America. Two days ago, 8 lives were taken in an Indianapolis shooting.

The Declaration of Independence includes the phrase “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Gen Z, in the spirit of that Declaration, is demanding our right to go to school in safety, our right to walk down our street safely, and above all, our right to live. In 2021, the failure to act is not just incompetence. It sends a message to a generation of Americans that our lives come second to a supposed right to own a gun—a supposed right that had no constitutional basis when we were born, but that was given legitimacy, even then limited legitimacy, in the Supreme Court's disappointing 2008 *Heller* decision. More than a decade after 20 children were massacred at Sandy Hook Elementary School, it's long past time for our government to replace thoughts and prayers with meaningful action to prove that the United States is a country that loves its children more than its guns.