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## ***Seeking Refuge***

By

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“El sueño americano que me vendieron es una mentira.” “The American Dream they sold me is a lie,” I overheard my mother wearily mutter under her breath as she guided me through our vacant, dimly lit neighborhood streets. As we made our way to my elementary school for the first time, I could sense a lifetime’s worth of fear in the closeness with which she held me, not realizing she was protecting me from the gun violence that continues to ravage America today.

Inspired by the American Dream's promise of a better life, she fled Mexico's drug cartel-related crime and sought refuge in the U.S., only to find her safety similarly threatened by armed violence. In agreement with Chief Justice Burger’s statement, I believe my refugee mother and I, and the rest of the American public, have been subject to not only the Second Amendment's fraudulent misinterpretation, but also the growing epidemic of gun violence that has come of it.

This ever-worsening threat to American safety has manifested largely due to the false interpretation of the Second Amendment by special interest groups, namely the National Rifle Association (NRA). Their self-interested distortion of our Constitution's original intent to protect the security of the state has led to the erroneous and dangerous belief that every American citizen has the absolute right to own a firearm. The pro-gun legislation that has emerged from the NRA's misinterpretation has paradoxically led to an increasingly common and deadly series of high-profile gun crimes.

Our country's proliferating gun violence highlights the inadequacy of present-day gun control laws as well as the grim reality that an armed citizenry is unsafe, especially for racial/ethnic minority children. An alarming 2022 study led by Boston

University found that nine million American children lived in a neighborhood that experienced at least one fatal shooting each year from 2015 to 2019. Among these children, Hispanics were over two times more likely to be exposed to gun violence than Whites— a disparity that only widened during the COVID-19 pandemic and is even greater among Blacks. As senseless acts of armed violence continue to dominate national headlines, it is unequivocally clear that the Second Amendment's false interpretation is, in fact, a “fraud”— a weapon of political coercion that is stripping far too many of their fundamental right to safety and inordinately impacting America's historically marginalized populations.

America's epidemic of gun violence desperately calls for the adoption of stringent gun control laws in our country comparable to the laws in other high-income democratic countries that have far lower rates of gun-related deaths, including far fewer deaths in children. We need to follow the examples of countries like Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand and adopt definitive measures, including complete bans on civilian ownership of all handguns and all automatic and semi-automatic long guns, to stop not only the frequent mass shootings, but the more than 100 fatal shootings on an average day that terrorize Americans of all ages and that exact a disproportionate toll on racial/ethnic minority children.

In solidarity with the late Supreme Court Chief Justice Burger's statement, I am resolved to use my voice, in all of its languages, to challenge pro-gun rhetoric and the fraudulent misrepresentation of the Second Amendment; to raise awareness of the need to adopt definitive measures to protect our children from the threat of gun violence; to help realize my refugee mother's long-held vision of achieving her American Dream.

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