

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 30, 2022

Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, M.D., M.P.H.  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Dr. Walensky:

We write today regarding the urgent need to better understand how the United States can address the alarming trend of mass school shootings. On November 30, 2021, four students were killed and six students and a teacher were injured at Oxford High School in Michigan, the latest tragedy to strike where children should feel safe—at school.<sup>1</sup> As lawmakers at federal and state levels seek to prevent the next mass shooting through policy changes, it is critical that we have a better idea of the public health needs to reduce gun violence. Therefore, we urge the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to prioritize funding projects—including through policy evaluation research—that prevent firearm-related violence in schools.

Last year, President Joe Biden announced a series of actions his Administration would take to address the gun violence public health epidemic.<sup>2</sup> These initiatives include urging the Department of Justice to publish model Extreme Risk Protection Order legislation, sometimes called “red flag” laws, and investing in evidence-based community violence intervention. Furthermore, the CDC has restarted the funding of research projects to prevent firearm-related violence for the first time in over two decades.<sup>3</sup> According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, this federal funding is essential to understand what puts children at risk of injury and death from guns to help keep children safe.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Oxford High School reopens nearly 2 months after shooting*, The Oakland Press (January 24, 2022) (online at <https://www.theoaklandpress.com/2022/01/24/oxford-high-school-reopens-nearly-2-months-after-shooting/>).

<sup>2</sup> *FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Announces Initial Actions to Address the Gun Violence Public Health Epidemic*, The White House (April 7, 2021) (online at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/07/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-announces-initial-actions-to-address-the-gun-violence-public-health-epidemic/>).

<sup>3</sup> *Can New Gun Violence Research Find a Path Around the Political Stalemate*, The New York Times (March 27, 2021) (online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/27/us/politics/gun-violence-research-cdc.html>).

<sup>4</sup> *Gun Violence Prevention*, American Academy of Pediatrics (online at <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/gun-violence-prevention/>).

To truly understand the urgent need to act, one must only look at the dangerous impact that gun violence has on students across the country. According to the Children’s Defense Fund, a staggering one-third of children are worried about a shooting happening at their school; to put that statistic into context, that ranks higher than being peer pressured and not fitting in with classmates.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps most heartbreaking of all, in 2018, a student’s risk of dying in a school shooting reached its highest level in at least 25 years.<sup>6</sup>

As you know, scientific and medical research has led to policies that have saved lives for decades. For example, expanded research into seat belt usage has resulted in thousands of lives saved each year; according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, seat belts saved an estimated 14,955 lives and could have saved an additional 2,549 people if they had been wearing a seat belt in 2017.<sup>7</sup> Beginning in the Fiscal Year 2020 government funding bill, the \$25 million dedicated for gun violence prevention research will hopefully lead to similar advancements—taking action to reduce gun violence will save thousands of lives yearly.

While continued research will be critical to the policy debate, we must be clear—research alone will not prevent the next mass school shooting. We must pair robust, focused research with common-sense policies that will ensure individuals who should not own a gun are unable to get one and that individuals who should not have access to a gun are prevented from obtaining one. And most importantly, we must do everything in our power to prevent firearms from entering schools.

As the CDC evaluates proposals for its next round of grants, we urge you to prioritize applicants focused on reducing gun violence in schools. We thank you for your engagement on this issue and stand ready to use this critical research to shape public policy to ensure all students are safe at school.

Sincerely,



Brenda L. Lawrence  
Member of Congress



Elissa Slotkin  
Member of Congress

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<sup>5</sup> *School Shootings Spark Everyday Worries: Children and Parents Call for Safe Schools and Neighborhoods*, Children’s Defense Fund (September 2018) (online at <https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YouGov-SafeSchools-Final-Sep-18-2018.pdf>).

<sup>6</sup> *Mass Shootings*, Giffords (online at <https://giffords.org/issues/mass-shootings/>).

<sup>7</sup> *Seat Belts*, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (online at <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/seat-belts#:~:text=Seat%20Belts,-Language%3A%20English&text=Many%20Americans%20understand%20the%20lifesaving,estimated%2014%2C955%20lives%20in%202017.>).

/s/  
Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Karen Bass  
Member of Congress

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Madeleine Dean  
Member of Congress

/s/  
John Garamendi  
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/s/  
André Carson  
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/s/  
Joe Neguse  
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Betty McCollum  
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Kim Schrier, M.D.  
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