



A Union of Professionals



Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
568 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
House Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

November 27, 2023

K-12 Organizations Urge Congress to Protect Students & Families by Reinstating a Federal Assault Weapons Ban

Dear Leaders Schumer, McConnell, Johnson, and Jeffries:

As the leading national education organizations committed to building safe learning environments and ensuring that every child can grow and reach their full potential, we strongly urge Congress to reinstate a strengthened federal assault weapons ban as quickly as possible. For the first time, firearms are now the leading cause of death for children under the age of 19.¹ Many more children and youth experience trauma and other adverse effects of exposure to gun violence. Our nation’s schools, communities and families cannot wait.

The recent mass shooting and devastating tragedy in Lewiston, Maine where 18 people were killed and another 13 injured by an assault weapon only exemplifies for us the horrific reality of the damage access to weapons of war by any individual in our nation can cause to a local community. While the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act signed into law in June 2022 makes some necessary improvements to existing gun laws, we must not stop there.

We have witnessed in horror as military-style weapons have been deployed against children and educators learning and teaching at school, against families exercising their right to worship, against seniors shopping, against communities celebrating together, and now against communities enjoying local evening recreational activities together. In the aftermath, we work to rebuild communities that are shattered, comfort children haunted by fear and memory, and carry those families whose children will now never have the opportunity to grow into adults or who may live with the trauma of bearing witness to, being injured in, or even the daily threat of violent events involving an assault weapon, let alone a firearm, occurring in their own community.

Make no mistake, assault weapons serve no purpose of sport or personal protection. These weapons of war were specially designed for military use to inflict extreme widespread damage, and they do not belong in the hands of civilians.

Gun violence prevention advocates have called for increased restrictions on civilian access to military style weapons of war for decades. Congressional inaction has resulted in countless and entirely preventable tragedies including the school shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas; the racially motivated shooting in Buffalo, NY; and the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. In each of these instances a teenager legally purchased a military style assault weapon to carry out these horrific acts of violence. In the case of Lewiston, Maine an effective red flag law policy in place may have prevented that individual from purchasing the weapons he used, but a federal assault weapons ban would have assured it.

The original assault weapons ban that sunset in 2004 was passed on a bipartisan basis by Congress as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, with the support of law enforcement and colleagues from across the aisle. Then and today, the majority of Americans – Republicans and Democrats – continue to support common sense gun safety measures such as limiting access to military-style weapons.² Research demonstrates that gun laws that restrict access to high-powered weapons that are capable of mass destruction in a short period of time reduce gun related deaths.³ Multiple empirical studies demonstrate a significant rise in mass shootings following the expiration of the ban,⁴ and state laws limiting magazine size are associated with a nearly 50% reduction in fatal mass shootings.⁵

We strongly urge Congress to protect students and families from weapons of war by reinstating the federal assault weapons ban. No one should fear for their life by simply participating in local community activities, going to school or going about their daily lives. Together, we must protect

our nation's families where they live, learn, and play and build safe communities where every child has the opportunity to grow and reach their full potential.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or would like to discuss further with us, please contact Kate Clabaugh, National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA) Director of Government Affairs, at kclabaugh@pta.org.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Federation of School Administrators
American School Counselor Association
Council of Administrators of Special Education, Inc.
National Association of School Psychologists
National Education Association
National PTA
Teachers Unify to End Gun Violence

¹ See Underlying Cause of Death, Age 1-18, 2020, Search Results. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved July 19, 2022. <https://wonder.cdc.gov/controller/saved/D76/D292F153>. See also Goldstick, Jason E., Cunningham, Rebecca M. & Carter, Patrick M. "Current Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States." The New England Journal of Medicine. April 20, 2022. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2201761>.

² See Schaeffer, Katherine. "Key facts about Americans and guns." Pew Research Center. Sept. 13, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/09/13/key-facts-about-americans-and-guns/>. See also Durkee, Alison. "Support For Gun Control Laws Hits Record High, Poll Finds." Forbes. June 15, 2022. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alisondurkee/2022/06/15/support-for-gun-control-laws-hits-record-high-poll-finds/>.

³ See "Gun Violence and Youth [Research summary]." National Association of School Psychologists. 2019. <https://www.nasponline.org/x54359.xml>.

⁴ See DiMaggio C, Avraham J, Berry C, Bukur M, Feldman J, Klein M, Shah N, Tandon M, Frangos S. "Changes in US mass shooting deaths associated with the 1994-2004 federal assault weapons ban: Analysis of open-source data." The Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery. 2019. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30188421/>.

⁵ See Webster DW, McCourt AD, Crifasi CK, Booty MD, Stuart EA. "Evidence concerning the regulation of firearms design, sale, and carrying on fatal mass shootings in the United States." Criminology & Public Policy. Jan 30, 2020. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1745-9133.12487>.