

March 15, 2018

A Jewish Call for Ending Gun Violence in the United States

We, the undersigned 20 national Jewish organizations and institutions, are strongly united in calling for immediate action to address and end gun violence in America. Our Jewish communities, like so many others, are heartbroken by the horrific shooting in Parkland, Florida, where one individual, armed with a military grade weapon of destruction, transformed an esteemed place of learning into a killing field.

But we are no longer shocked. The killing of 17 innocent people in Parkland was not an isolated tragedy. Twelve were gunned down at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, in 2012. Forty-nine were slaughtered at a nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in 2016. Fifty-eight were brutally murdered at a concert in Las Vegas, Nevada, in 2017. Each year, there are tens of thousands more gun-related deaths that do not make national headlines. In 2018 alone, there have already been 41 mass shootings and 618 children under the age of 18 have already been killed or injured by a gun.

While the current spate of mass shootings and carnage is utterly unacceptable, the proliferation of open and concealed carry options is not the solution. We recognize and respect the right of law-abiding Americans to own handguns and rifles for legitimate purposes, but we refuse to accept a dystopian future where schools, houses of worship, community centers, shopping malls, theaters, and other venues require armed security, and where children and adults are fearful of going out in public.

The Jewish community has a deep and abiding concern for public safety. Driven by our belief in the sanctity of life and the commandment against murder, we are committed to a comprehensive approach to confronting gun violence. No single solution will prevent all future tragedies, which is why we advocate for a balanced, multipronged approach that includes the following measures:

- Meaningful legislation to halt or limit access to the most dangerous weapons (including, but not limited to, assault weapons) and high capacity ammunition magazines that serve no other purpose than to inflict maximum carnage.
- Appropriate waiting periods, volume sales restrictions, and universal background checks for all firearm sales, including criminal and mental health reviews.
- Registration and tracking for all firearms at the time of sale or subsequent transfer and periodic licensing for anyone that purchases, owns, carries, and or uses firearms.
- Diligent enforcement of firearm regulations and expansion of federal laws prohibiting gun trafficking and straw purchases.

- Robust efforts to ensure that every person in need has access to quality mental health care. This includes fully funding our mental health system and requiring true parity between physical and mental health. These efforts must take great care not to mischaracterize those with mental illness as violent, but rather to address all possible causative factors.
- Authorization and funding for the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to research the effects of gun violence.
- Resources for schools to enhance their security through infrastructure improvements and other support programs consistent with due process, individualized needs, and best practices.
- A serious national conversation about violence in media and the role of civil society organizations to confront the proliferation of violent images.

Judaism instructs that prayer without action is just the recitation of words. The time for lawmakers to act is now.

Sincerely,

AJC: Global Jewish Advocacy
 American Conference of Cantors
 Anti-Defamation League
 Bend the Arc Jewish Action
 B'nai B'rith International
 Central Conference of American Rabbis
 Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
 Jewish Council for Public Affairs
 Jewish Labor Committee
 Jewish Women International
 Men of Reform Judaism
 National Council of Jewish Women
 Orthodox Union
 Rabbinical Assembly
 Reconstructing Judaism
 Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
 T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
 Union for Reform Judaism
 United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
 Women of Reform Judaism