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May 24, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United State Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
United States House of Representatives
233 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Reid, Speaker Ryan, Leader Pelosi, and Members of Congress:

We write to urge Congress to take immediate action to address the nationwide public health and safety crisis created by gun violence. Specifically, we ask that Congress: (1) direct funding to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) for the purpose of studying the causes and prevention of gun-related injuries and death; and (2) eliminate the rider annually included in the appropriations bill prohibiting the use of any CDC funds “to advocate or promote gun control.” There is no time to waste. As the chief civil or criminal law enforcement officers of our respective states, we are charged with keeping our communities safe, and we need better evidence-based strategies to combat the epidemic of gun violence that is ravaging our families and communities.

Working closely with our state partners, virtually all of our offices play a vital role in regulating the sale and possession of firearms, enforcing or defending those laws and regulations, and promoting essential public health programs to address the root causes of gun-related injuries and deaths. On a daily basis, we work to mitigate the devastating effects of gun violence on families and communities. Our offices or our state partners in law enforcement prosecute gun-related crimes, direct services to victims of violent crimes, and collaborate with community-based violence prevention programs. We strive to keep legal guns safe, illegal guns off the street, and sellers in compliance with the law. CDC-funded research on causes and prevention of gun-related injuries and death would enhance our ability to do that very work. We strongly believe that investigation and analysis by national experts will assist our offices to more effectively target our resources, advocacy, and enforcement.

The proliferation of gun-related deaths calls for action. More than 33,000 people die every year in the United States from gun violence. The majority of these deaths are not caused by gun homicide, but suicide. And, unintentional shootings account for almost 600 deaths annually. Gun violence also disproportionately affects communities of color, as African Americans are nearly twice as likely to be killed by guns as white individuals. To reduce the number of gun violence victims, we need to better understand the risk factors and the effectiveness of prevention methods associated with gun-related injuries and death. Analyses of prevention measures, such as intervention and counseling by healthcare providers and gun safety improvements, as well as research into the root causes and psychology of gun violence are needed to inform our response.

As the nation's principal public health agency, the CDC is uniquely positioned to lead the way in stemming the tide of gun-related deaths and injuries. The CDC distributes over \$11 billion in research funding annually, providing critical resources to scientists making world-leading breakthroughs every day. Congress should fund the CDC to research urgent questions about the causes of gun-related injuries and death to help determine the most effective intervention and prevention strategies. Specifically, CDC studies are needed to improve our understanding of gun incidents, identify the sources of firearms, and evaluate gun storage methods. Otherwise, we are failing to take advantage of a critical tool with a proven track record of solving complex health challenges like this one.


In other areas, CDC research to evaluate risk factors and prevention policies has saved lives. For example, research into motor vehicle deaths by the CDC helped reduce the number of automobile deaths from nearly 42,000 in 1997 to under 34,000 in 2013. This 19% reduction in fatalities occurred even though more Americans are driving more miles every year. Meanwhile, gun-related deaths are on pace to exceed automobile deaths.

Since 1996, more than half a million Americans have died by firearms. During that same period, federal funding for gun violence research by the CDC was cut by 96%. Federal restrictions on CDC funding have prevented the scientific community from helping us understand how to respond to this epidemic, which has needlessly cost lives. By sidelining the CDC, the United States has severely limited progress on data collection and analysis and has discouraged public health professionals from working in this field. Many basic questions remain unanswered.


The CDC's mission is to protect America from health and safety threats. Gun violence is a serious threat to our nation's health and safety. We urge Congress to provide funding for gun violence research by the CDC and to eliminate the rider that has been construed to limit the CDC's authority to research the causes and prevention of gun-related injuries and death. Scientific evidence would bolster the effectiveness of efforts around the country to reduce gun violence, and would make a significant difference in the millions of lives that are affected, both directly and indirectly, by that violence every year.

Thank you for your consideration of our request, and please let us know if we can provide you with any other information that would be useful in your deliberations.

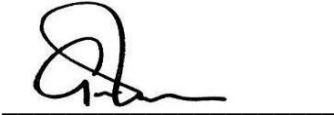
Very truly yours,




Maura Healey
Massachusetts Attorney General



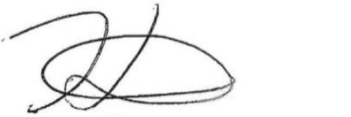
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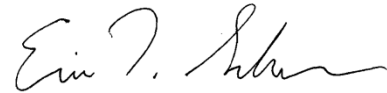
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Maryland Attorney General




Eric T. Schneiderman
New York Attorney General



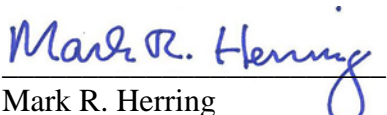
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