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WHEN
THOUGHTS
AND
PRAYERS
AREN'T
ENOUGH

A SHOOTING SURVIVOR'S
JOURNEY INTO THE REALITIES
of GUN VIOLENCE

Online Resource

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT GUN REFORM



WHAT TYPES OF WEAPONS DOES THE SECOND AMENDMENT COVER? WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR GUN REFORM?

The Second Amendment reads as follows:

Amendment 2: Right to Bear Arms. A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.

A lot has changed since the writing of this amendment. When the amendment was written, its primary justification was to prevent the United States government from implementing a standing, or professional army. As in, an army made up of professional, full-time soldiers. You might be thinking, we have that now...and you'd be right. Because, things change. The authors of the amendment believed, because of their experiences that as long as they were under the reign of a professional army they would never be free. So, they believed in the formation of militias and ability of those militias to organize and fight back against a tyrannical government.

The men who wrote the Bill of Rights wanted every citizen to be part of the militia, and they wanted everyone part of the militia to be armed. Under the Articles of Confederation from 1777, states were required to maintain their own "well-regulated and disciplined militia."¹ Another key point here is these same men were pretty concerned about who should and shouldn't be armed. Laws didn't allow enslaved African Americans to own weapons and rarely allowed for them to be owned by free African Americans. Militias frequently inspected slave quarters and took any weapons they found. There were also laws preventing Native Americans from owning and purchasing guns as well. The second amendment was used by White Americans to exert control over nonwhite people. Today we interpret the second amendment as being written about an individual or personal right to bear arms, an interpretation supported by many constitutional experts, though there is evidence that point to this not being a primary concern for the authors.

We don't have state sanctioned militias anymore. We don't have the need for them. Even if a need arose in which we would desire to overthrow the government, I feel confident our military force would have no problem defeating us. Stockpiling weapons for use in a potential coup is a bad justification for stockpiling weapons. Whether or not the amendment was written about militias or individual rights, we can't ignore those two words "well regulated." Either way, those words mean something, regardless of what staunch Second Amendment supporters say.

I'm not a historian or a constitutional scholar. All I can do is read the words of the Second Amendment, consider the context and time period in which they were written, read what people who are smarter than I have to say about them, and figure out what I think about it. And this is important, because a majority of the arguments against any type of gun reform are rooted in interpretation of the second amendment. So, we need to know at least a little about what we think about it, right? I am grateful to be an American and to live this country, and I am grateful for the foresight many of the founders had in the rights they outlined. However, they were just imperfect men, writing imperfect things down on a piece of paper, without the ability to predict what the world would look like hundreds of years later.

These same men also owned and abused enslaved people and didn't consider women to be worth equal human value, denying them equal rights under the law. We have to be discerning in how we evaluate what they wrote. I was taught in school that the documents upon which our country was founded were considered "living documents" meaning we have the ability to continually update it and revise as necessary. The term recognizes the original authors of these documents weren't perfect and they couldn't have known what we would need 300 years after they wrote it. The context of the world has changed. We don't need militias anymore. We have a professional standing army. And the machinery has changed. I doubt the authors of the Bill of Rights foresaw a time in which we had assault style weapons that could be customized to shoot 26 people in 30 seconds, like in the Dayton attack in August 2019. The level of carnage possible with today's weapons would have been unfathomable to them. The amount of civilians killed by other civilians and law enforcement alike by use of firearms would have been equally unfathomable.

At the end of the day you can make the second amendment, like a lot of other things, mean what you want it to mean and you can find support for that from a variety of sources. We can't know for sure what the authors of the amendment meant. So here is where I say something that may seem a bit radical or anti-American. I kind of don't care what the authors of the second amendment meant. I care what they meant for the time they lived in and I care about how it impacted the country we live in today. But, the Second Amendment wasn't written for everyone. Even if we knew exactly what they meant, the amendment still has obvious shortcomings and flaws. And ultimately, we have elevated the Second Amendment to be some sort of all knowing, flawless decree considered on par with the Bible. Staunch supporters of it consider it to be above critique and revision. Even if the Second Amendment truly did mean that people have the right to own whatever gun they want, however many they want, and do whatever they want with those guns, does that mean we should let it continue to mean that? We've wasted so much time debating what the Second Amendment means and what its authors meant when they wrote it, when, honestly, I don't think it matters. The entire point of the Bill of Rights was to "amend" the Constitution- to add things it missed, to rectify mistakes it made. Somehow, we have designated this amendment to be immune to this process, making it more important than all other rights, and it just isn't. If a law isn't working, if it is harmful, if it is dangerous, if it is being used to justify evil, then it needs to be fixed. We do this with plenty of other laws in our country. The Second Amendment is not and should not be immune to this.

HOW HAS THE NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION (NRA) IMPACTED GUN LAWS?

When it was formed in 1871, the NRA's purpose was to train hunters and marksmen on gun use and to educate on firearm safety. For decades they supported strong gun regulations: high taxes on guns and ammunition, prohibited sawed-off shotguns, and silencers, prohibited felons from obtaining firearms, and even required gun owners to register their guns with the government. It wasn't until 1968 when Congress passed the Gun Control Act of 1968 that the organization began to transform into what we know it as today. This law placed heavy restrictions on shipping guns across state lines and restricted the purchase of guns based on factors like mental health,

drugs addiction, and age. The NRA supported it, but pushed back against attempts for a nationwide registry and license requirement. After that, they began lobbying and rating political candidates on an A-F scale and by 2001 they had become the most powerful lobbying group in Washington.²

In 2016, the NRA spent more than \$30 million to help elect President Donald Trump, compared to 2012 when they spent about \$13 million in attempts to elect Mitt Romney. The organization spent \$54 million in total on the 2016 elections (Fortune Magazine). The thing about having that much money invested in politicians that win, is you can expect a significant return on that investment. The politicians who accept money from the organization consistently vote against any and all measures for gun reform, even when the American people overwhelmingly support them. After the shooting at Sandy Hook School in 2012, a staggering 90 percent of Americans supported expanding background-checks.³ The NRA, however, used their influence and successfully blocked congressional efforts to do so.

The NRA also played a key role in ending the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's ability to do research on gun violence. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention created a center dedicated to reducing deaths and injuries from violence and funded studies relating to gun violence. One of these studies conducted by researcher Arthur Kellerman, showed "an increased risk of homicide associated with presence of a firearm in the home."⁴ After the results of this study and others like it began making their way throughout the country, the NRA accused the CDC of being biased against guns and lobbied Congress to stop the CDC from conducting the research into gun violence. As a result, in 1996 a provision was added to the spending bill that said, "none of the funds made available in this title may be used, in whole or in part, to advocate or promote gun control."⁵

The extent to which the bill banned firearm injury research has been debated since then. However, the general understanding within the government and the CDC was that all research that could be perceived as anti-gun was to be stopped. The CDC was at the mercy of Congress, and members of Congress were at the mercy of a group, which had spent a lot of money to get them elected. In 2011 the Dickey Amendment was extended to include the Nation Institutes of Health (NIH) as well as the CDC after the NIH funded research on the association between gun possession and assaults. After the Sandy Hook shootings, President Obama signed an executive order lifting the ban on gun violence research by the CDC and urged Congress to allocate \$10 million in funding for it, but the Republican controlled House of Representatives denied the request.⁶

In March 2018, Congress passed a \$1.3 trillion spending bill, which included a compromise on gun violence research. Along with this was a report clarifying that although government money still couldn't be used to promote gun control, the CDC does have the authority to conduct research on gun violence and its causes.⁷ Although this was a step in the right direction, it's hard to say how impactful this will be. This is because Congress must approve any funding, and many members are still beholden to the NRA and their money.

In recent years the NRA has opposed almost every proposed option for gun reform. In April 2019 Congress was set to have a vote reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act, originally enacted in 1994 to help victims of sexual and domestic violence. This version of the bill included a new provision to close both the stalking loophole and the boyfriend loophole by "prohibiting people convicted of abusing, assaulting, or stalking a dating partner, or those subject to a court restraining order from buying or owning firearms."⁸ The NRA opposed the legislation, saying it was too broad and could include people sending harassing messages online even if they had never actually met. The director of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms responded to that by saying "A single tweet or Facebook message, without significant other conduct would not ordinarily be enough to result in a conviction for stalking." The NRA began pressing its allies in Congress, saying they would be scoring politicians based on their vote concerning the Violence Against Women Act. The house voted to pass the bill, with support from more than 30 Republicans. The bill stalled in the Senate though and still has not been passed.⁹

The NRA has opposed other reforms like Extreme Risk Protection Orders as well, citing lack of due process for those who stand to have their guns taken away, even though all states and localities with these types of laws have a process for how they work to ensure rights to due process, often including multiple court hearings. Following the shooting in Parkland Florida in February 2018, the NRA voiced support for possible ERPO laws after realizing a majority of Americans seemed to support them. However, they continued to use their connections to defeat a red flag law in Utah, and urged its members to do the same for one in Maryland, once again citing due process concerns. Lindsey Graham, a Republican Senator from South Carolina, along with Senator Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat from Connecticut proposed a law to create an ERPO process for federal court. The NRA opposed this law as well.¹⁰

The NRA says they don't want dangerous people to have access to firearms, and yet at every possible turn, they choose to oppose legislation to stop more dangerous people from having them. Additionally, they propose legislation to weaken current gun laws. In recent years the NRA has backed laws allowing concealed carry reciprocity, allowing guns on college campuses, opposing closing the private gun sales loophole, and legislation that would prohibit the sale of guns to people on the federal government's terrorist watch list. They've also backed laws pushing for legislation that would eliminate schools as "gun-free zones" and allow weapons in schools and even day-care centers, and pushed to expand the right to carry concealed weapons in bars and restaurants.

The NRA has also worked to weaken law enforcements abilities to regulate firearms and the firearm industry. Until 2004, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) had been able to keep data on the history of guns used in murders and shootings at their National Tracing Center. This allowed police and policymakers alike to trace the guns to holes in the system or corrupt firearms dealers.¹¹ That year, US Representative Todd Tiahrt (R-KS) proposed the Tiahrt Amendment, backed by the NRA, which prohibited the ATF from releasing firearm trace data. This law also required the FBI to destroy all approved gun purchaser background checks within 24 hours, and prohibited the ATF from requiring gun dealers to submit their inventory lists to law enforcement. The inventory lists are meant to help law enforcement keep track of the loss or theft of firearms and oversee the sales of all firearms. The records are also used to uncover trafficking rings and patterns in background checks that involve people using someone else's name in order to be approved for purchasing guns.¹² The Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence conducted an analysis in 2008, showing more than 30,000 guns were missing from gun dealer inventories nationwide.¹³ Without oversight for these sellers, there is little that can be done to prevent corrupt sellers from engaging in illegal gun trafficking under the guise of thefts. The NRA also pushed for reducing funding to the ATF, and also for restrictions on how the ATF can use the money they do get. One provision in the Tiahrt Amendment prohibited The National Tracing Center from compiling firearm sales records into an electronic database, claiming this type of database would be a threat to second amendment rights. Instead, the center is required to keep paper records in a warehouse.¹⁴ Every time the center gets a request for a gun trace, around 372,300 times per year they are forced to dig through paperwork and make phone calls, which on average take four to seven business days to complete. They do have a data system, in which they are allowed to scan files and save them as images or PDFs, but the system specifically cannot be searchable. The ATF has attempted to consolidate all the data into one system in the past, but the Government Accountability Office determined this was not allowed, and the ATF was required to delete all the records on the server.¹⁵ It has to be noted the NRA has had a contentious relationship with the ATF for almost 50 years. This is due to events like the raid at the apartment of longtime NRA member Ken Ballew, the 1992 siege of Ruby Ridge, and the 1993 raid at the Branch Davidian Complex near Waco, Texas.

All of this is information necessary to understanding how the gun industry in America influences the way we think about and enact gun reform laws. The NRA in its original form created the persona of the “responsible gun owner”- offering educational services and training to gun owners and supporting legislation to put limits and regulations on what gun owners could do or own under the Second Amendment.

The term, responsible gun owner, used to mean something. I don't think it does anymore, at least not in a quantifiable sense. I know people who by all definitions of the word are responsible with their guns. They maintain them to keep them in working order, they take classes and complete all the legal requirements, and they keep them stored safely and securely. But how can we possibly continue to use this term when at every turn the NRA has worked to dismantle the ways in which we evaluate someone to be a responsible gun owner? Without adequate regulations and rules, the term is quickly becoming a myth. Along the way, the NRA began to fall for widespread conspiracy theories and fear campaigns about the government overreach and began to operate under the assumption the government would eventually get rid of the second amendment altogether. And they have continued under this premise ever since. They have masterfully constructed a narrative of fear and propaganda around the idea that we are all under a constant threat from an ever-present enemy, and they have gained all their power on this premise. The NRA does a good job spreading fear about governmental overreach when it comes to guns and its one major reason people oppose any form of gun control. They've been taught that one step, even a small one, is just the first one in a plan that ends with the government showing up at your house to take your weapons. I can't tell you how many conversations I have had with people about proposed gun reform plans that involve some variation of:

“That sounds reasonable, but it is a slippery slope.”

“To what end?” I ask.

“To taking away our right to own guns at all,” they say.

The truth is the slippery slope argument is called a fallacy for a reason. The idea that an extreme risk protection order law will inevitably lead to a ban and confiscation on all guns is, in a word, absurd. This idea doesn't account for the middle- the place where debate, oversight, rules, regulations, policy proposals, and laws take place. The slippery slope argument is used to instill fear and create paranoia. I always think it's interesting when the same people who cite the slippery slope argument when it comes to guns are the same ones who would be considered extremely patriotic- supporting the military, the police, and their elected officials without wavering. How can one pledge allegiance to the flag of America, stand in salute of the flag, sing the words “God bless America, land that I love” and at the same time have such doubt about the people they elected? At some point, you have to choose to trust the system under which you live and to which you have pledged your allegiance. If you trust them enough to send your fellow citizens to war to protect you, you should trust them enough to not let reform become confiscation. You can't pledge your allegiance and at the same time stock weapons in your underground bunker just in case you need to overthrow them. You have to choose.

The NRA as we know it today is a well-oiled machine. Its one purpose is to serve gun manufacturers and make sure people are allowed to own whatever gun or weapon they want and however many guns they want, because it serves the gun manufacturers. It also serves them as well. They spend their money, in excessive amounts, to elect people who will serve this mission and then wave the amount over their head at any utterance of gun reform as a reminder of who helped get them there. If you were someone who has supported the NRA, been a member in the past, or are currently a member today, I would urge you to ask yourself “why?” What are you really supporting? Are you still involved simply because you always have been? Their actions and their money speak for themselves. They don't care about gun safety or about keeping dangerous weapons out of the hands of dangerous

people. It is obvious to those of us in the gun reform activism community that until NRA money is out of Congress, we will have a hard time passing meaningful gun reform legislation. When an overwhelming amount of Americans support forms of gun reform, NRA money is controlling our representatives in such a way that they are not doing the job we elected them to do. If our representatives don't vote the interest of the people they represent, they aren't doing their jobs. And they can't do their jobs when they are beholden to money. Lobbyist money has helped to control members of Congress for decades, and in the case of the NRA, it is costing us our safety and our lives. And yet until NRA money is out of Congress, our best chance of competing with the NRA is with money.

HOW DO BUYBACKS WORK? ARE THESE LIKELY TO HAPPEN?

Gun buyback programs are when gun owners are allowed to trade in their firearms to government agencies, typically law enforcement, in exchange for compensation. Often the compensation is in the form of a voucher to be redeemed for cash or other items of value. The guns are exchanged with no questions asked, so people who bring them are not subject to background checks or other inquiries into their criminal past. When research was done in the early 1990s about buyback programs, it largely found these programs were ineffective at preventing gun violence. However, recently we are seeing new findings. One important result of buyback programs is they can help influence how the general public feels about efforts to deal with gun violence.

In the United States, it is usually local law enforcement and community organizations that runs these kind of voluntary programs. Other countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, have instituted nationwide buyback programs. Australia held their buyback program after a 28-year-old man walked into a cafe and used a semi-automatic rifle to kill 35 people and wound 38 more. From 1996-1997, they had a buyback program and collected guns at police stations and drop off sites. Every gun turned in was rendered inoperable immediately to ensure guns wouldn't be stolen and to assure the citizens the guns they turned in wouldn't be used by law enforcement. They collected around 650,000 guns and studies showed that in the seven years after the buyback program, the firearm suicide rate fell by 57 percent and the homicide rate fell by 42 percent.¹⁶The suicide statistic is especially notable, because non-gun suicides did not increase to make up for a lack of access to firearms. Meaning, people did not search out other ways to end their lives when they were unable to access guns. New Zealand's program is still too recent to have solid findings. It's important to remember both countries faced significant protest and criticism for their plans. The Australian prime minister even delivered a speech to protesters wearing a bulletproof vest. However, both countries felt it was the right thing to do to save the lives of their citizens, and forged ahead with the programs.

The numbers out of Australia are encouraging, however, neither Australia nor New Zealand can be a fair comparison for what might happen in the United States. The U.S. has a much higher population of both people and guns, with a smaller percentage of the population owning a majority of the guns. It's truly hard to know how effective a national gun buyback program would be in the United States, especially if we take into account the type of resistance we would see from gun owners.

Funding is an issue for buyback programs as well. Estimates from The Trace show even a small-scale national buyback that just offered compensation for AR-15 rifles would cost around \$700 million, which would be the largest single investment in gun violence prevention in US history. If this expanded to all types of rifles, we would be more in the ballpark of \$17-88 billion.¹⁷Local entities running these programs in their cities face the same issue: funding.

Another factor to note is the types of weapons included in buybacks. While assault style weapons are mentioned most often, they are not used in the majority of homicides and suicides; handguns are. However, the main point

of assault weapons bans is not to reduce overall gun deaths, it is to reduce gun deaths from mass shootings. Any buy-back program would have to be viewed as just one way to decrease gun violence, not the end-all-be-all of gun violence prevention.

What reform options are popular and likely to work?

Many options for gun reform are widely supported by Americans. One survey conducted by PBS Newshour, NPR, and Marist found that:

Eighty-three percent support required background checks for private and gun show sales.

Seventy-two percent support a national red flag law, and

Seventy-two percent support requiring a license before a gun purchase.

Fifty-seven percent support a ban of semi-automatic weapons

Sixty-one percent support banning the sale of high capacity magazines, and

Eighty-nine percent support increasing funding for mental health services.¹⁸

Banning weapons of war (assault weapons ban), requiring safe storage for guns in the home, raising the age requirement to 21 instead of 18, limiting the amount of guns someone can purchase at one time, holding gun dealers accountable for lost guns, and strengthening background checks are all options for gun reform. These have the most evidence of effectiveness to support them and are all supported by a majority of Americans. I think it is easy to feel like gun reform is an uphill battle or that you are in the minority if you support gun reform simply because gun reform advocates maybe aren't as loud as gun rights advocates. One reason the NRA is so powerful is because of the dedication of its members. Gun rights advocates are four times as likely to donate money or write to a politician about the issue of gun reform than those who support gun reform efforts.¹⁹ For a long time, gun reform has been seen as a radical or extremist view, but the more normalized gun reforms can become, the more people will be willing to be outspoken with their support of them.

WHY DO PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT THEY NEED A GUN FOR SELF-DEFENSE?

Simply, because they are told that they are constantly under threat and the best way to protect themselves is with a gun. This seems like a simple answer, but it's true. Historically, the NRA has garnered national support for weak gun laws and restrictions by convincing people they are constantly in danger and need to protect themselves. Without widespread rhetoric about how dangerous the world is, there isn't as much of a reason to believe so strongly in the need to protect. People don't support things like safe storage laws and restrictions on how they can purchase weapons if they believe they need immediate access to guns to keep themselves and their families safe. The truth, however, is those good guys with guns rarely intervene in dangerous events like mass shooting situations. And even rarer is it that the good guy is simply an armed civilian. In an FBI study of 160 active-shooter events from 2000-2013, they found only seven incidents when an armed civilian used a gun to end the shooting, and six of those involved a professional such as an off duty cop or armed security guard. Nationwide there are only about 100 burglary-homicides each year, and research shows having a gun on your person can actually create more risk for you than security.²⁰ Are we sometimes at risk for dangerous situations? Of course. I write this as a person who is vividly acquainted with that. However, basing all gun laws on a small possibility of needing and using a gun for self-defense is unwise and ineffective. People are taught to be scared and we are operating out of that fear, we are just afraid of the wrong things.

HOW DID CHRISTIANS BECOME ENMESHED IN THE PRO-GUN CROWD?

A Pew Research Center study found the highest rates of gun ownership in the United States are in white, Republican, evangelical men. At 44 percent, White Evangelicals own guns at the highest rates of all religious groups.²¹

High gun ownership among Christians can be traced back to the idea commonly touted by gun rights advocates: God granted the right to bear arms to all Americans; it is our birthright to do so. This ideology is most popular among Americans who subscribe to the idea of Christian Nationalism, the belief America was specifically chosen by God to receive blessings, and has always been and should continue to be a Christian nation, and our policies and symbols should reflect that. Interestingly enough, an examination conducted by The Washington Post found Americans who attend religious services more often are actually supportive of gun control.²² This tells us there are a lot of people who identify as evangelical Christians even if they aren't dedicated to the faith, and that the people who are, support gun control. Even in evangelical traditions, those who don't identify with Christian Nationalism actually support gun control more than those in a mainline Protestant or Catholic tradition. This shows there is a lot of hope for Christians to become active in the fight for gun reform, but for those who subscribe to the Christian Nationalism ideology, the battle will be much harder. For Christians who believe owning a gun is a God-ordained right, there's not much that can convince them to support gun reform. They truly believe God blessed us with the freedom to own guns and do with them what we wish. Changing the hearts about what Christians believe about God and country is the first step.

WHAT CAN CONGRESS DO?

A lot! In 2018, Congress banned bump stocks, an accessory used in the Las Vegas shooting. Congress can also do things like expand background checks, raise the age requirement for purchasing guns, ban high-capacity magazines, and reinstitute an assault weapons ban. They can also close loopholes like the Charleston and Boyfriend loopholes, and expand funding for mental health services. Furthermore, Congress could implement things like buyback programs and provide funding for them, but those have less bi-partisan support than other measures.

IS THERE A MIDDLE GROUND THAT IS EFFECTIVE?

I think so, and I think we are closer to it than we've been in the past. I often talk about gun reform in terms of compromise- that in order to save lives and reduce gun violence, gun rights advocates must be willing to compromise. In response, I am asked, "If we are supposed to compromise on the Second Amendment, what are gun reform activists willing to compromise on?" The truth is that those of us working for safer gun laws have already compromised on a lot. When the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence was formed, the original name was the National Coalition to Ban Handguns. Back then, most gun reform groups were strictly prohibitionist, meaning they wanted to ban guns altogether. Today, however, most groups acknowledge respectful gun owners and the need for compromise. I see groups trying to figure out ways to make background checks more effective, to protect children from unlocked and loaded weapons, to protect people from risk of firearm suicide, and much more, all the while still allowing gun users to keep weapons for self-defense, sport, and hunting purposes. I don't see similar compromises from the gun rights side. Instead, I regularly see attempts to create even weaker and more dangerous laws. There is a middle ground, but both side of this issue have to be willing to get there.

HOW DO WE ADDRESS FIREARM SUICIDE?

You stop thinking about it as being different than firearm homicide. When people pushback and offer that gun violence statistics should not include those that involve suicide, I ask, "Did you know that the presence of a gun increases suicide risk by 3 times?" And I ask "Why is that life different than another life?" Guns make suicide attempts more accessible and more fatal. If we are in the business of protecting all lives and considering all lives to be precious and sacred, that includes people who die by suicide and people who are suffering such tremendous

pain that they feel suicide is the only way out. If guns make that suffering more deadly, then we need to be concerned about the guns.

WOULD NEW GUN REFORM LAWS AFFECT HUNTERS?

In general, gun laws account for the use of weapons in hunting. One proposed form of gun control is increased taxation on guns and ammo, which does have the potential to decrease accessibility for people who hunt who may not be able to afford increased costs. It is important to note that gun owners who use their guns for hunting account for less than 5 percent of Americans. Gun owners were almost twice as likely to report owning guns for protection than for hunting.²³ Some hunters want to carry a handgun for protection; however, studies have shown bear spray is more effective for the purpose of protection from bears, and less likely to cause other damage including accidentally shooting another person.²⁴ Many hunters have become outspoken in support of gun control in recent years, even as they fear criticism from fellow hunters. The real threat facing hunters now is lack of lands on which to hunt.

HOW DO WE DEAL WITH ILLEGAL GUNS?

By the very nature of illegal gun trafficking, it's hard to know the most effective ways to get illegal guns off the streets. However, a good place to start would be by slowing the flow of guns into the hands of people who shouldn't have them. Based on what we know about how people illegally get guns in the first place, there are a couple things we can do to start. We need to begin holding firearms dealers accountable for lost and stolen inventory. Currently, it is not required for dealers report their inventory to the ATF, therefore there is little law enforcement can do to trace stolen guns. In one analysis, just 1 percent of licensed dealers were responsible for almost 60 percent of guns traced to crime.²⁵ States could help reduce the number of guns illegally obtained from firearms dealers by requiring dealers have a license to sell from the ATF. Currently only 17 states require a state license, and only two states require regular inspections of firearms dealers.²⁶ Another way to stop the flow of illegal guns would be screening all firearm purchases, included universal background checks on all gun purchases, weathering private sales or not. A gun registry would be helpful in facilitating tracing of guns, along with mandatory reporting when a gun is stolen. Without mandatory reporting of gun theft, owners can claim their gun was stolen at any time without having to offer any proof. Dealers are also not required to report thefts or missing inventory.²⁷ Laws that limits the number of guns that can be purchased every month, like the one recently passed in Virginia, can reduce illegal guns by reducing the number of guns a trafficker can purchase at one time. It's an uphill battle, but it's not impossible.

DO COPS IN SCHOOLS PREVENT SHOOTINGS?

The support for putting armed security guards in more schools has grown in recent years amongst pro-gun circles of people. However, does this really work to prevent school shootings? For a lot of students, having an armed guard at school is already a reality. Forty-three percent of public schools had an armed officer for the 2015-2016 school year according to a survey published in 2018.²⁸ However, we really don't have evidence to prove armed guards reduce school shootings or school violence, because of course, it's hard to measure things that never happened. There have been, however, some instances in which an armed guard or officer has stopped a school shooting. In 2018 a school resource officer chased a gunman off of a high school campus and shot and injured him. It is more likely for the shooter to stop on their own or die by suicide at the end of their rampage. Criminologists at Texas State University studied responses to active shooter incidents at schools and found that in the

25 shootings occurring at schools, an armed teacher, guard, or police ended none of them. Most of them were ended when unarmed staff restrained the shooter.²⁹ It is a common talking point that shooters target “gun-free zones” more often than other locations, referring to students in schools as sitting ducks waiting to be targeted by shooters. However, when we analyze the research we find it’s just not true. Historically gunmen have targeted schools with armed guards. In recent years shootings have taken place at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Great Mills High School, Santa Fe High School, and Marshall County High School, and every single one of these schools had armed guards. And at every single one, the guards failed to stop the gunmen, even choosing to simply flee the scene altogether like at MSD. For his book *Rampage Nation*, author Louis Klarevas analyzed 111 shootings between 1966-2015 and found only 18 of them took place in locations where firearms were not allowed.³⁰ I think the support for putting armed guards makes sense because it makes parents feel better to think of someone being at their child’s school who can protect them when they can’t. It’s an easy option. But often it just creates an atmosphere of fear for students and teachers alike, and there is little evidence the benefits outweigh the negative effects that are felt in that type of environment.

The negative aspects of having school police officers go beyond creating an atmosphere of fear, however, and play a part in what’s known as the “school to prison pipeline.” This refers to the way students are often punished for bad behavior as criminals, instead of students who need support, resources, and counseling.³¹

WHY DO PEOPLE THINK DEFENSIVE GUN USE IS SO PREVALENT?

The myth of widespread defensive gun use can be traced back to one singular study published in 1992 by Gary Kleck and Marc Gets, criminologists at Florida State University. The study has since been widely discredited. Still, the findings of the study have been used by the NRA and their members to make false claims about the defensive use of guns. The study claims guns are defensively used over 2 million times every year and firearms are used 80 times more often to defend innocent lives than to take lives.³² For a few years after the study was published, these claims were made without little pushback. Now however, we have solid evidence to show the ways the study was conducted did not take into account different biases or unreliable reporters, and made mathematically impossible conclusions. Even Kleck admitted in 1997 that 36-64 percent of defensive gun uses reported in the survey were most likely illegal uses, as in the guns were used to intimidate or harm someone. This was later confirmed by a Harvard study, which showed 51 percent of defensive gun uses were illegal.³³ Unfortunately, the news that this study was discredited never made it as far as the original findings did, and we have built years of gun laws around a myth of widespread heroic defensive gun use.

HOW DO I TALK TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS ABOUT SAFELY STORING THEIR GUNS WHEN MY KIDS ARE AT THEIR HOUSE?

I know these conversations can be uncomfortable, especially if you’re dealing with a family member or friend who is really into guns and has them in their home. It can be easy to push the thought of your child or their friend finding a gun out of your mind and chalking it up to it won’t happen to me. And yet, I imagine most parents of kids who found unsecured guns in someone’s home had the same thought. Its’ estimated 4.6 million minors live in homes with at least one loaded, unlocked firearm. We also know 73 percent of kids under age 10 who live in homes with guns reported that they know where the gun is kept.³⁴ My mindset is to operate as if it’s always possible my child could find a gun if there is one in the house. It may feel awkward to ask, but it’s better to have an uncomfortable conversation than to get a call that all parents dread. Choose the conversation.

The good news is that it's not as terrible as you imagine it to be. Organizations like Be Smart for Kids and ASK even offer conversation starter guides and sample scripts for you to use. A simple text saying "Hey! So excited for the kids to get together. I always like to ask if there are any guns in the home and if they're stored safely? Thanks!" is all it takes. If you're going to visit a family member, simply say, "Hey, we are excited to see you! I know I haven't asked this before but I just wanted to make sure the guns will be stored safely while we are there. Can you let me know how you'll keep them secure?" If you have a teenager who acts as a babysitter, they should ask the same questions for the family they work with. "Just wanted to confirm I'll be at your place at 6pm, and my parents wanted me to ask if there are unsecured guns at your house?" This shouldn't be an issue if your family and friends love and care about your kids and want to keep them safe. You'll find that you may even feel silly for worrying so much about the conversation once it's over. Other parents often feel glad you brought up the issue because it gives them the confidence to do it themselves. If someone refuses to lock up their guns, make it a dealbreaker, or offer to host the playdate or visit at your house. The best part? The more you ask, the easier it gets and the more comfortable you'll be the next time. I don't want to minimize the anxiety having these conversations can bring, but I do think it's important to remember why you're having them. An accidental shooting is far worse than an uncomfortable conversation.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

It can be easy to feel powerless when it comes to gun reform. So much of it feels out of our hands so it's easy to assume we can't do anything to affect change. I feel that way sometimes, too. But there are a lot of things we can personally do to help reduce gun violence in America. It's helpful to remember ending gun violence doesn't begin with the US Congress. It begins in your home and spreads into your local communities, your state, and then eventually, we get to Congress.

Learn about programs like BE SMART and ASK that encourage Safe Storage and teach you how to talk to your family and friends about keeping unsecured guns away from children and teens. In 2019, there were 309 unintentional shootings by children in 2019 that resulted in 120 deaths and 201 injuries.³⁵ Experts anticipate the 2020 numbers being even higher, due to an increase of children staying home more often and a high rate of gun purchases during the COVID-19 epidemic.³⁶ Keeping guns away from people who can do harm means kids, too.

Ask your local gun dealers if they are part of the Responsible Firearms Retailer Partnership, created by Walmart and Everytown for Gun Safety, which outlines 10 voluntary actions they can take that will help make sure guns don't get into the hands of people who shouldn't have them. If they aren't part of the partnership, provide them with information, which you can find on the Everytown website, and ask if they would consider joining the movement.

Help change the culture surrounding guns. This involves asking local retail establishments and petitioning corporate businesses to change their gun policies to disallow people from carrying guns inside their businesses. We don't have to only change laws; we also have to change the idea that people need guns every place they go. In recent years places like Target, Starbucks, Chipotle, and Trader Joe's have all changed their policies due to pressure from gun reform advocates and their customers who don't love the idea of staring at a gun while they decide if they want white or wheat bread.

Donate to organizations that are doing the work on a large scale like Everytown for Gun Safety, Moms Demand Action, the Violence Policy Center, Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, Brady United Against Gun Violence, and Giffords Law Center. You can also donate directly to organizations supporting survivors in the aftermath of gun violence like Survivors Lead and The Rebels Project.

Donate to local gun violence reduction initiatives. Some areas have organizations that do work locally to help reduce violence in their own communities through prevention programs and even gun buyback programs. The organization Gun X Gun works with organizations across the country to help fund gun buybacks. The Los Angeles Police Department in partnership with the Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development has a citywide gun buyback initiative that collected 7,300 guns in 2017 alone.³⁷ Contact your local community center or Department of Social Services to see if there is a similar program in your community, or if they offer support services to gun violence survivors you could get involved with. There are a lot of great programs already in existence, but they take money to work. Donating financially when you are able will help tremendously.

Take interest in your statewide elections. Nationwide Congressional races get more attention, and they are important. But a lot of gun reform work gets done in the State government and it's important to find out what is taking place in your own state. For example, a gun reform bill has been waiting to be put to a vote since the spring of 2018; meanwhile, the Virginia state senate just passed a package of gun reform laws. Those include a requirement of background checks for private sales, a red flag law enabling Extreme Risk Protection Orders, a requirement to report lost or stolen guns, and the reinstating of a one-handgun-a-month law.³⁸ There are similar things happening in other states as well, proving that your state government is just as important when it comes to gun reform. Learn about the candidates and vote for the person fighting to end gun violence.

Post on social media. While sharing controversial opinions on social media can be daunting and often seen as a waste of time, sharing your opinion about gun reform on social media can actually be really helpful to the cause. Chances are, you have a handful of Facebook or Instagram friends who feel the same way you do, but are just as scared of speaking up about it. Seeing a friend post about gun reform can help offer encouragement and in a sense, permission, to do the same. And the best part? You don't have to get in a fight if you don't want to. You don't even have to respond to comments if you don't want to. A simple "We disagree on this issue and I'm going to choose not to engage" is a fine response I employ whenever I see fit.

WHAT CAN CHURCHES DO TO HELP?

We learn a lot about what we should care about from our church, and we learn to stay silent on things in the same way. Churches have a unique ability to help change the conversation around gun violence from one of politics alone, to one of Christian love and justice. We are living in a time where, thankfully, churches are speaking out and educating on more social justice issues than we have in the past. Issues like racism, systemic injustice, and systemic poverty are now taking their place in our church's conversations, and it's time for gun violence to be included as well. If you have ever talked about abortion in church, or participated at a church-led protest at an abortion clinic, you should talk about gun violence, too.

Organize a showing of the 2015 documentary; "The Armor of Light"³⁹ which follows an evangelical minister and the mother of a teenage shooting victim as they work to answer the question "Is it possible to be both pro-gun and pro-life?"

If your church is in an area where gun ownership rates are high, organize a gun safety workshop. Ask a local law enforcement official or gun safety expert to come speak to the gun owners in your church about how to protect kids and family members when there are guns in the home.

Talk about local and national gun violence. If you live in an area that experiences a high rate of gun violence, give regular updates about how many people in your community have been affected in recent weeks. Keeping the issue in people's minds is important when it comes to realizing gun violence isn't just something that happens out in the world, it happens in your neighborhood too. If there is a heavily covered mass shooting, talk about it at church and pray for all affected. Simply mentioning gun violence in church goes a long way.

Support gun violence survivors both physically and financially. Survivors often experience intense financial hardships including medical bills and lost wages from work. This is especially true if a family has lost their sole income provider. Often survivors need areas of their homes remodeled to accommodate their injuries or health issues, or need special equipment to help them function daily. Showing up financially for the community shows survivors they are not forgotten by God or their community. Organize a special collection or fundraiser. If someone needs adjustments made to their home, ask a contractor or someone experienced in renovations to volunteer their time and gifts.

If your congregation is heavily divided on the issue of gun reform, organize a small group that may be interested in learning about it and do a bible study centered on a related topic. The study “Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities”⁴⁰ is a great option.

If your denomination isn’t involved in conversations about gun reform, find one that is and learn from what they’re doing. The United Methodist Church has been a leader in the movement and offers a variety of resources to encourage Pastors who may need support and education.