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## **Superheroes Needed to Stop Gun Violence**

A Message from Dr. Bill Durston  
President, Americans Against Gun Violence  
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As media outlets have focused their attention on the US presidential race, the past month has been a relatively quiet one – by US standards, at least - for gun violence in the news.

On September 16, an unarmed black man was shot and killed by a white female police officer in Tulsa, Oklahoma. A cell phone video appears to show the man with his hands in the air at the time he was shot. The police officer was charged with manslaughter.<sup>1</sup> An autopsy subsequently showed that the man had the hallucinogenic drug, PCP, in his system.<sup>2</sup>

On September 27, another unarmed black man with a history of mental illness was shot and killed by a white police officer in El Cajon, California. Videos show the man crouching, pointing a small object at police just before he was shot. The object proved to be a vaping device.<sup>3</sup>

On the other side of the officer involved shooting issue, on October 5, a sheriff's sergeant was shot and killed while investigating a burglary call at a residence in Lancaster, California, a suburb of Los Angeles.<sup>4</sup> The shooter had a long criminal history. The officer, 29 year old Steven Owen, was revered for his service to the community.

The next day, two police officers were shot, one fatally, by an 18 year old young man during a disturbance call in a suburb of St. Louis.<sup>5</sup> The shooter had previously expressed animosity and threats toward police. The deceased officer left behind a wife and two year old child.

In Palm Springs, California, on October 8, two officers were killed and one wounded by a man with an assault rifle as they were responding to a disturbance call.<sup>6</sup> One of the slain officers was a 27 year old woman who had just returned from maternity leave.

Over the past month, there were at least 27 mass shootings in the United States in which four or more people were killed or wounded, but only one of these shootings was of enough interest to make the front page of most major newspapers. In Townville, South Carolina, on September 28, a 14 year old boy shot and killed his father with a handgun, then drove his father's truck to the Townville Elementary School, from which he had previously been suspended for bringing a gun, and shot a teacher and two students.<sup>7</sup> One of the students, six year old Jacob Hall, died three days later as a result of his gunshot wound.<sup>8</sup> Jacob had loved to pretend that he was a superhero, and he was dressed as Batman as he lay in repose at his funeral.<sup>9</sup> Per his family's request, mourners also came to his funeral in superhero costumes.

Tragedies like these don't happen on a regular basis in any other high income democratic country of the world. The reason for the extraordinarily high rate of gun violence in the United States is obvious, and the way to stop it is just as obvious, yet few people dare to talk about it.

The rates of drug abuse and mental illness in the United States are similar to rates in other high income democratic countries.<sup>10</sup> The level of economic inequality is similar.<sup>11</sup> Overall rates of violence are actually lower in the United States than in most other high income democratic countries.<sup>12</sup>

The obvious reason for the extraordinarily high rate of gun violence in the United States is the extraordinarily high rate of firearm availability, which is due, in turn, to the extraordinarily lax gun control laws in the USA as compared with every other high income democratic country of the world.<sup>13</sup> The obvious way to drastically reduce rates of gun violence in the USA to levels comparable to those in other high income democratic countries is to adopt comparable stringent gun control laws, including strict regulation, if not complete bans, on civilian ownership of handguns and semi-automatic rifles.

We don't need people dressed in superhero costumes to stop gun violence in our country., We need real superheroes – ordinary people like you and me - to demand that our elected officials enact definitive gun control laws like those in place in every other high income democratic country of the world – countries in which mass shootings, shootings of civilians by police, and shootings of police by civilians - are rare or non-existent and in which overall rates of firearm related deaths and injuries are far lower than in the USA.

The cost of an annual membership in [Americans Against Gun Violence](#) is just \$25, much less than the cost of renting a Batman or Superwoman costume. Please go to the Join/Donate page of the Americans Against Gun Violence website at [aagunv.org](http://aagunv.org) today to become a charter member, if you aren't already one, and to make an additional donation if you're able. And please also go to the Facts and FAQ's page to learn of other steps that you can take right now to help stop gun violence in our country, including asking the difficult questions of candidates for elected office that most politicians try to avoid during this election season.

On Halloween, if a child comes to your door dressed as Batman, or if you take a child trick or treating yourself, think of Jacob Hall, and ask yourself if you're doing enough to protect our children from the epidemic of gun violence that kills children in the USA at a rate 12 times higher than in other high income democratic countries.<sup>14</sup> And if you go to a costume party, instead of dressing up as a pretend superhero, be a real one. Join us at [Americans Against Gun Violence](#), and encourage others to join as well, to prove that we are a country that loves its children more than its guns.

Sincerely,



Bill Durston, MD  
President, Americans Against Gun Violence

Note: Dr. Durston is a retired emergency physician, a combat veteran, and a former expert marksman in the U.S. Marine Corps, decorated for courage under fire during the Vietnam War.

## References

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