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Press Release

Americans Against Gun Violence Responds to Mass Shooting at Nashville “Waffle House” Restaurant

Sacramento, California, April 24, 2018: Americans Against Gun Violence extends heartfelt sympathy to the families, friends, and colleagues of the four young people who were killed in the mass shooting on Sunday, April 22, at the “Waffle House” restaurant in Nashville, Tennessee. We also extend our sincere wishes for a prompt and complete recovery to the other two young people who were seriously wounded in the shooting. We applaud the bravery of the unarmed bystander, James Shaw, who was also injured as he wrestled the shooter’s assault rifle way from him.

Mr. Shaw’s courageous act demonstrates the untruthfulness of the gun lobby’s claim that “The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.” This is not the first time that an unarmed bystander has stopped a mass shooting in progress. In a study of 160 active shooter incidents between 2000 and 2013, the FBI found 21 cases in which unarmed bystanders disabled the shooter and only one case in which an armed civilian other than a paid security guard or off-duty police officer stopped the shooting.¹

The alleged shooter in the Nashville killings, 29 year old Travis Reinking, had reportedly demonstrated signs of serious mental illness on multiple occasions.² The AR-15 style assault rifle that he used in the mass shooting had at one point been taken away from him by law enforcement officers and given to his father for “safe-keeping.”³ His father reportedly gave the rifle back to Reinking at some point prior to the Nashville shooting. At the time of this writing, it is unclear if any state or federal law was broken in the transfer of the assault rifle back from father to son.⁴

The fact that Travis Reinking was able to ever obtain an assault rifle demonstrates what the late Senator Thomas Dodd (D-Connecticut) described in 1968 as “the ridiculous ease” with which almost anyone in the United States can get almost any kind of gun.⁵ Although mental illness was probably a factor in the Nashville mass shooting, it is not the main reason for the extraordinarily high rates of gun violence in the United States. The rate of mental illness in the United States is comparable to the rates in other high income democratic countries of the world,⁶ but the rate of gun homicide in the USA is 25 times higher than the average rate in those other democratic countries,⁷ and the USA is the only high income democratic country in the world in which mass shootings occur on a regular basis.⁸

It is the position of Americans Against Gun Violence that there is no legitimate civilian use for high powered semi-automatic rifles of the kind used by Travis Reinking and numerous others to commit mass shootings in recent years. We believe that the United States

should follow the example of Australia and move rapidly to ban all civilian ownership of such weapons.⁹ We further believe that the United States should heed the advice of Senator Thomas Dodd who said in June of 1968:

“Pious condolences will no longer suffice....Quarter measures and half measures will no longer suffice....The time has now come that we must adopt stringent gun control legislation comparable to the legislation in force in virtually every civilized country of the world.*”¹⁰

Such gun control legislation includes stringent restriction, if not complete bans, on civilian ownership of handguns and all automatic and semi-automatic rifles.¹¹ Such gun control legislation also requires placing the burden on anyone seeking to obtain a gun to show good reason why he or she needs one rather than placing the burden on society to prove that he or she should not have one.

*The final sentence in this quotation is the prompt for the Americans Against Gun Violence National High School Essay Contest.

¹ J. Pete Blair and Katherine Schweit, “A Study of Active Shooter Incidents, 2000-2013” (Texas State University and Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014).

² Alan Blinder, Simon Romero, and Julie Bosman, “Waffle House Shooting Suspect Once Had His Guns Taken Away. He Got Them Back.,” *The New York Times*, April 23, 2018, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/23/us/nashville-shooting-suspect-guns.html>.

³ Diane Pathieu, Tanja Babich, and Michelle Gallardo, “Tenn. Waffle House Shooting Suspect from Illinois in Custody, Police Say,” ABC7 Chicago, April 23, 2018, <http://abc7chicago.com/3381353/>.

⁴ Blinder, Romero, and Bosman, “Waffle House Shooting Suspect Once Had His Guns Taken Away. He Got Them Back.”

⁵ Thomas Dodd, “Text of Speech by Senator Thomas Dodd on Floor of U.S. Senate: The Sickness of Violence and the Need for Gun Control Legislation” (Office of Senator Thomas Dodd, June 11, 1968), http://thedoddcenter.uconn.edu/asc/research/gun_control.htm#; Thomas Dodd, “Press Release: Pious Condolences Will No Longer Suffice” (Office of Senator Thomas Dodd, June 10, 1968), http://thedoddcenter.uconn.edu/asc/research/gun_control.htm#.

⁶ L. Andrade et al., “Cross-National Comparisons of the Prevalences and Correlates of Mental Disorders,” *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 78 (2000): 413–425.

⁷ Erin Grinshteyn and David Hemenway, “Violent Death Rates: The US Compared with Other High-Income OECD Countries, 2010,” *The American Journal of Medicine* 129, no. 3 (March 1, 2016): 266–73, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2015.10.025>.

⁸ Max Fisher and Josh Keller, “What Explains U.S. Mass Shootings? International Comparisons Suggest an Answer,” *The New York Times*, November 7, 2017, sec. Americas, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/07/world/americas/mass-shootings-us-international.html>.

⁹ Rebecca Peters, “Rational Firearm Regulation: Evidence-Based Gun Laws in Australia,” in *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 195–204; Philip Alpers, “The Big Melt: How One Democracy Changed after Scrapping a Third of Its Firearms,” in *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 205–11; Simon Chapman, Philip Alpers, and Michael Jones, “Association between Gun Law Reforms and Intentional Firearm Deaths in Australia, 1979-2013,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 316, no. 3 (July 19, 2016): 291–99, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2016.8752>.

¹⁰ Dodd, “Quarter Measures and Half Measures Will No Longer Suffice”; Dodd, “Pious Condolences Will No Longer Suffice.”

¹¹ “Guns in the United States — Firearms, Gun Law and Gun Control,” GunPolicy.org, accessed June 12, 2017, <http://www.gunpolicy.org/firearms/region/united-states>.