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Press Release

Americans Against Gun Violence Responds to Highlands Ranch, Colorado, Mass Shooting

Sacramento, California, January 1, 2018: Americans Against Gun Violence extends heartfelt sympathy to the family, friends, and colleagues of Deputy Zackari Parrish who was killed in the mass shooting in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, on the morning of December 31, 2017, as he and fellow officers were responding to a domestic disturbance call in an apartment building. We also extend our heartfelt sympathy and sincere wishes for a speedy and complete recovery to the four other law enforcement officers and two civilians who were wounded in the shooting.

The Highlands Ranch mass shooting demonstrates the less publicized aspect of officer involved shootings – cases in which law enforcement officers are shot by civilians in the line of duty. In 2016, the FBI reported that 66 law enforcement officers were feloniously killed in the line of duty, up from 41 officers feloniously killed in 2015.¹ Of the 66 law enforcement officers murdered in the line of duty in 2016, 62 (94%) were killed with guns (37 with handguns, 24 with rifles, and one with a shotgun). The other four slain officers were struck by motor vehicles.

The Highlands Ranch mass shooting also demonstrates one of the fallacies in the argument that civilians should carry guns “for protection.” The “guns for protection” argument fails to take into account the element of surprise involved in criminal assaults. According to initial reports, at least four of the five officers who were shot by the single assailant in the Highlands Ranch incident were taken by surprise and hit by bullets within a matter of seconds, before they could fire their own weapons.² The officers had been trained to anticipate that all suspects may be armed. The County Sheriff, Tony Spurlock, commented after the shooting:

We respond to every call anticipating that everyone has a gun. This is Colorado. Everybody has a gun.

The fact that at least four of the five officers shot in the Highlands Ranch mass shooting were unable to defend themselves with their own weapons is consistent with a previous FBI report that showed that 85% of law enforcement officers killed by guns in the line of duty never fired their own weapons,³ and 20% were killed with their own guns.⁴ It was also reported that all of the officers shot in the Highlands Ranch incident, like 82% of the slain officers in the 2016 FBI report,⁵ were wearing body armor at the time that they were shot. Given that highly trained law enforcement officers wearing body armor who are shot and killed in the line of duty usually don't have a chance to even fire their own weapons, it's unlikely that most civilians will be available to effectively defend themselves with a gun.

On the contrary, one study has shown that someone carrying a gun at the time of an assault is four times more likely to be killed than someone who is not carrying a gun.⁶

The Highlands Ranch mass shooting also adds to enormous body of evidence demonstrating the need for definitive gun control regulations in the United States. The United States is the only high income democratic country in the world in which mass shootings,⁷ shootings of police by civilians, and shootings of civilians by police⁸ occur on a regular basis. Moreover, the overall rate of gun homicide in the United States is 25 times higher than the average rate in other economically advanced democratic countries.⁹ The reasons for the extraordinarily high rates of gun violence in the United States are clear. The United States has by far the most lax gun control laws and the highest rates of gun ownership of any high income democratic country in the world.

It is the position of Americans Against Gun Violence that the United States should adopt stringent gun control laws comparable to the laws that have long been in effect in all other high income democratic countries. Such laws include stringent regulations, if not complete bans, on civilian ownership of handguns and all automatic and semi-automatic rifles. Such laws need not prevent responsible hunters and target shooters from practicing their sports with traditional sporting rifles and shotguns. In order to stringently regulate or ban handguns, the Supreme Court's radical reinterpretation of the Second Amendment in the 2008 *Heller* decision must be overturned. We further believe that stringent regulation of civilian firearm ownership should be accompanied by stringent regulation of the use of lethal force by law enforcement officers.

¹ “FBI Releases 2016 Statistics for Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted in the Line of Duty,” Press Release, Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed December 31, 2017, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2016-statistics-for-law-enforcement-officers-killed-and-assaulted-in-the-line-of-duty>.

² Sarah Aarthun and Steve Almasy, “Denver Shooting: Deputy Killed, 6 Wounded by Barricaded Suspect,” CNN, December 31, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/31/us/colorado-shots-fired/index.html>.

³ “Killed in the Line of Duty: A Study of Felonious Killings of Law Enforcement Officers” (Uniform Crime Reports Section, Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, September 1992), 5, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/139198NCJRS.pdf>.

⁴ “Killed in the Line of Duty: A Study of Felonious Killings of Law Enforcement Officers,” 40.

⁵ “2016 LEOKA Report Released,” Story, Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2016-leoka-report-released>.

⁶ Charles C. Branas et al., “Investigating the Link Between Gun Possession and Gun Assault,” *American Journal of Public Health* 99, no. 11 (November 1, 2009): 2034–40, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2008.143099>.

⁷ “Mass Shootings: How U.S. Gun Culture Compares with the Rest of the World,” Washington Post, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/world/mass-shootings/>.

⁸ Jamiles Lartey, “By the Numbers: US Police Kill More in Days than Other Countries Do in Years,” *The Guardian*, June 9, 2015, sec. US news, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/09/the-counted-police-killings-us-vs-other-countries>.

⁹ 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>.