



Americans Against Gun Violence
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2018 National High School Essay Contest \$250 Winner

(Name withheld at student's request)

It's Time for a Change

In 1999, two teenagers shot and killed 15 people, including themselves, and injured another 24 at Columbine High School. It was one of the deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history. After the Parkland shooting in Florida on February 14, Columbine is no longer listed in the top ten deadliest mass shootings in the United States. Rates of gun violence in the United States, which peaked in 1993, declined after enactment of the Brady Act in 1994 requiring background checks for gun purchases from federally licensed firearm dealers. Since the year 2000, though, overall rates of gun deaths have been gradually increasing, and the number of people killed in mass shootings has increased dramatically. No other country comes close to the amount of mass shootings seen in America annually. We could blame mental health but other countries have mentally ill people too. We could blame violent movies but other countries have violent movies too. We could blame gang violence but other countries have gangs too.

We can avoid actually addressing the gun issue in our country by calling the issue a mental health issue. It's absolutely true that mental health treatment in our country is a huge issue. Our government must do more to help the mentally ill; however, if these people can still get guns, then providing mental health treatment doesn't help the problem. Until a law is passed that makes it harder for people with mental health issues to obtain guns of any kind, we are putting our schools at risk in the future by not addressing the root cause of the issue.

The goal of the debate over guns isn't to take every single gun away from every single American. The real goal is to make it harder for people who shouldn't have guns to get them and to keep military grade weapons out of the hands of civilians. We need stricter gun control. No one should be able to buy a gun before they turn 21. No one should be able to buy a gun without undergoing a mental evaluation and a more thorough background check than is used currently. No one should have access to semi-automatic, automatic, or assault weapons, such as an AR-15 rifle. No one should be able to buy a gun before undergoing mandatory training on how

to use a gun safely. No one should be able to buy a gun without a permit. No one should be able to own a gun not registered to them. No one should be able to buy a gun without a written test and a test proving they can shoot a gun with relative accuracy. Until we try to make it harder to get a gun nothing is going to happen. History will repeat itself, as it did with Columbine.

We must break the chain of repeated mass shootings, Congress sending their thoughts and prayers, Congress claiming this is a mental health problem and not a gun problem, and in the end, nothing changing only for same cycle to start over again after the next mass shooting. It's time to be proactive instead of reactive. Gun control has been proven to work in other countries; It's time for the United States to make a change.