



Americans Against Gun Violence
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**2019 National High School Essay Contest
\$250 Award Winner**

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The Right to Live is Not Ambiguous

The wording of the Second Amendment is arguably ambiguous. While some claim that the "right of the people to keep and bear arms" described in the Amendment confers an individual right, others, including the late Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun, have concluded that the right to bear arms is a collective one guaranteed only when there is "some reasonable relationship to the preservation or efficiency of a well regulated militia." While there is certainly ongoing debate about the historically correct interpretation of the Second Amendment, it is indisputable that the amount of death, injury, and emotional trauma that has resulted from the individual right interpretation has infringed upon our unambiguous right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness - a right that is described as inalienable in the Declaration of Independence.

Right now the largely unrestricted access to guns has created an ever present threat to the safety of Americans. There have been so many shootings - in schools, in places of religious worship, in homes - that people have become desensitized to the violence. The individual right interpretation of the Second Amendment is inconsistent with the need to protect the American people with stronger gun control laws. The original intent of the Amendment to ensure the "security of a free state," has become perverted into an instrument of communal harm.

Every morning at 8 am my sister and I go to school. Every morning we sit in the car, chatting about our assignments and tests. And every morning, as my sister and I part ways, an almost subconscious thought crosses my mind: "will we be ok at the end of the day?" I am sixteen years old, still learning my place in the world, and yet I have the additional daily burden of worrying whether my life, or the life of my sister, will be added to those sacrificed on the altar of "the right to bear arms."

Everyone can agree that there is no right to carry all arms. Nobody is entitled to build their own nuclear weapon, drive a tank down Main Street, or bring a rocket propelled grenade into a movie theater. If those arms are disallowed, then why are military style semi-automatic firearms permitted? These are not weapons of protection, deterrence, or sport. They are weapons of war.

Last year, the surviving students of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland Florida stood up to demand action to limit gun violence. They started the battle, and now we must continue it, using our words, our voice, our passion.

The question should not be the wording of the Second Amendment, but instead how to halt the gun violence. To the extent that the Second Amendment is ambiguous, it should not be interpreted in a manner that allows the epidemic of gun violence in our country to continue under the protection of our Constitution. In the short term, we must push to enact gun control laws that are similar to the laws in other civilized countries that have much lower rates of gun violence. In the long term, we can revise the Constitution so that it is no longer ambiguous with regard to the collective "right to bear arms." Amendments can be amended. We are the future leaders. It is up to us to protect our inalienable right to live freely and without fear.