



Americans Against Gun Violence
P.O. Box 661252
Sacramento, CA 95866
(916) 668-4160
www.aagunv.org / info@aagunv.org

Press Release

Americans Against Gun Violence Responds to Virginia Beach Mass Shooting

Sacramento California, June 2, 2019: Americans Against Gun Violence extends heartfelt sympathy to the families, friends, and coworkers of the 12 people who were killed in the mass shooting in the Municipal Center in Virginia Beach on Friday, May 31. We also extend our sympathy and wishes for a prompt and complete recovery to the other victims who suffered non-fatal wounds in the attack.

An NPR reporter who lives in Virginia Beach, Sara McCammon, commented on the PBS News Hour that people were reacting to the shooting “in sadly predictable ways.” A prayer vigil was held for the victims. Flags were flown at half staff. President Trump tweeted, “God bless the families and all.” But a local carnival went on as planned.¹ Speaking at a press release, Virginia Beach Police Chief James Cervera credited the rapid response and bravery of his officers for preventing more people from being killed and wounded, but he was reported to be “at a loss” to provide any suggestions concerning how the shooting might have been prevented in the first place.²

Initial reports indicate that the shooter, who was killed by police, was an employee at the Municipal Center. He reportedly used two semi-automatic handguns in the attack, both of which he had purchased legally. Semi-automatic handguns are the most commonly used firearm in mass shootings in the United States, and most mass shooters purchase their weapons legally.³ Handguns are also the most commonly used firearm in other gun homicides and in gun suicides.⁴ Owning or carrying a handgun provides no net protective value for honest, law-abiding people.⁵

The United States is the only high income democratic country in the world in which mass shootings occur on a regular basis.⁶ Our rate of gun homicide is 25 times higher than the average gun homicide rate in the other economically advanced democratic countries of the world.⁷ The reason for our extraordinarily high rate of gun violence is obvious. Our gun control laws are extraordinarily lax as compared with the laws in other high income democratic countries,⁸ and our rate of civilian gun ownership is

extraordinarily high.⁹

In 1968, the late Senator Thomas Dodd of Connecticut stated:

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 in the world.¹⁰

We have not heeded Senator Dodd's advice, and as a result, over the past 50 years, more US civilians have died of gunshot wounds than all the US soldiers killed in all the wars in which our country has ever been involved.¹¹

It is the position of Americans Against Gun Violence that the United States should adopt a complete ban on civilian ownership of all handguns and all automatic and semi-automatic rifles. In order to ban handguns, we must first overturn the rogue 2008 *Heller* decision¹² in which a narrow 5-4 majority of the Supreme Court reversed over two centuries of legal precedent, including four prior Supreme Court decisions,¹³ in ruling that the Second Amendment conferred an individual right to keep a handgun in the home. Until we adopt stringent gun control regulations comparable to regulations in other high income democratic countries, we should not ask ourselves why mass shootings continue to occur on a regular basis in our country, but rather why we fail to take the obvious steps necessary to prevent them.

References

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³ Mark Follman, Gavin Aronsen, and Deanna Pan, "US Mass Shootings, 1982-2018: Data from Mother Jones' Investigation," *Mother Jones* (blog), accessed May 31, 2018, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-mother-jones-full-data/>.

⁴ Josh Sugarmann, *Every Handgun Is Aimed at You: The Case for Banning Handguns* (New Press, 2001).

⁵ William Durston, "Should Law-Abiding People Own Guns for Self Protection," Americans Against Gun Violence: Facts and FAQ's, June 1, 2019, <https://aagunv.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/FAQ-guns-for-protection.pdf>.

⁶ 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>.

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 "Gun Law and Policy: Firearms and Armed Violence, Country by Country," GunPolicy.org, accessed December 3, 2017, <http://www.gunpolicy.org/>.

⁹ Fisher and Keller, "What Explains U.S. Mass Shootings?"; "Compare the United States – Rate of Civilian Firearm Possession per 100 Population," GunPolicy.org, accessed September 18, 2016, http://www.gunpolicy.org/firearms/compare/194/rate_of_civilian_firearm_possession/10,280,31.

¹⁰ 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#.

¹¹ Louis Jacobson, "More Americans Killed by Guns since 1968 than in All U.S. Wars, Columnist Nicholas Kristof Writes," @politifact, August 27, 2015, <http://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2015/aug/27/nicholas-kristof/more-americans-killed-guns-1968-all-wars-says-colu/>.

¹² *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 US (Supreme Court 2008).

¹³ *United States v. Cruikshank*, 92 US (Supreme Court 1876); *Presser v. Illinois*, 116 US (Supreme Court 1886); *U.S. v. Miller*, 307 U.S. 174 (1939) (n.d.); *Lewis v. United States*, No. 55 (U.S. 1980).