



Americans Against Gun Violence
921 11th Street, Suite 700
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 668-4160
aagunv.org / info@aagunv.org

A Letter to Americans Against Gun Violence from a Dunblane, Scotland Parent

With an Introduction by the President of Americans Against Gun Violence

As we reflect on 2019 and begin the New Year, Americans Against Gun Violence remains the only national gun violence prevention organization in the entire United States that openly advocates overturning the Supreme Court's ruling on the Second Amendment in the rogue 2008 *Heller* decision and adopting stringent gun control laws in our country comparable to the laws that have long been in effect in all other high income democratic countries of the world¹ – countries in which mass shootings, including shootings on school campuses, occur rarely, if ever,² and in which the rate of gun deaths is, on average, one tenth the rate in our nation.³ Given the formidable obstacles that we face in achieving our mission of stopping the U.S. epidemic of gun violence - an epidemic that disproportionately afflicts our children and our youth⁴ - it's difficult not to become discouraged and to even question at times whether we're the ones who are out of touch with reality.

We recently received a letter from Dr. Michael North who lost his daughter in the 1996 mass shooting at an elementary school in Dunblane, Scotland. Dr. North and other Dunblane parents spearheaded a campaign that was successful in achieving the enactment of a complete ban on civilian handgun ownership in Great Britain.⁵ (Britain already had stringent restrictions on assault rifles.) There have been no further school shootings since the ban was enacted,⁶ and the rate of gun deaths in Great Britain is currently 1/56th the rate in the United States.⁷ I urge you to read Dr. North's letter, which follows.

I hope that you will join me in making a New Year's resolution to not only stay our course, but to redouble our efforts in 2020 to prove through our actions, and not just our words, that we are a country that loves its children more than its guns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill".

Bill Durston, MD
President, Americans Against Gun Violence

A Letter to Americans Against Gun Violence from Dr. Michael North

Dear American Colleagues Against Gun Violence,

In March 1996 a man walked into my town's elementary school, Dunblane Primary School in Scotland, and shot dead sixteen 5- and 6-year-old children and their teacher, injuring many more victims. One of the children who died was my only daughter Sophie. All four of the gunman's handguns were legally-owned, and when the families realised how easy it had been for him to arm himself with lethal weapons we vowed to do something about it. We campaigned. We persuaded British lawmakers not to be swayed by the vested interests of the gun lobby, we asked them to put public safety first. Most British politicians listened and acted. Laws were changed, handguns were banned and the level of gun violence in Britain is now one of the lowest in the world. There have been no more school shootings.

Ever since I've continued to support tight gun legislation in the UK, and during the last 23 years I've had many opportunities to talk to people from around the world about their own concerns with gun violence. Most have been keen that lessons learned here should be taken on board by their own country. Almost without exception industrialised countries that have suffered horrific shooting events have reacted by recognising the danger of making guns too easily available, and they've tightened their laws. This should be how a decent society protects its own from the misuse of any dangerous item. And such measures pay off. International comparisons show there is a correlation between a country's level of gun ownership and the number of gun deaths. The fewer guns, the fewer deaths.

But among industrialised countries there's an exception, one country where lessons have not been learned and meaningful action is rarely taken. It is a country with a terrible record of gun atrocities, the nation where school shootings have become too commonplace. It is, of course, the United States of America, a close friend but on this issue we seem poles apart. The only factor common to all shootings is that someone has a gun, and in the USA it is too easy to get hold of one. Here in Great Britain there have been fewer than twenty gun homicides in total this year, that is well below the number of victims murdered with guns each and every day in America. Shouldn't the lesson be obvious? If, after each mass shooting, indeed after any fatal shooting, the USA really wants to turn its thoughts, tears and prayers into something positive it has to restrict the availability of guns.

After Dunblane we argued vigorously that public safety was paramount and must never be compromised by any right or privilege to own a gun. The Second Amendment of the US Constitution has been misconstrued to satisfy the desires of the U.S. gun lobby and ignore the safety of the majority of citizens. Surely the Founding Fathers would be horrified that their 18th Century words are being twisted to justify arming teenagers and other civilians with the types of weapon that have turned schools, workplaces and places of leisure into battlefields.

We're always being told of America's love affair with the gun, yet from over here it looks more like an abusive relationship, one that causes too much pain, misery and death. I hope that campaigners can seize the opportunity and change that relationship now, and allow your citizens to look towards a safer future.

I know how attempts to achieve meaningful changes to US firearms laws have been constantly met with attempts to deflect, to divide and to intimidate those who campaign. I want to wish all of you who continue to seek to make those changes the strength and endeavour needed. It is the toughest of tasks, but one that is so important in order to stop the suffering of more of your fellow Americans. Those of us left to deal with the aftermath of Dunblane are always with you in spirit, and I hope that I can provide further support by sharing our experiences from a country that took a positive step forward after tragedy.

Dr Mick North
2 December 2019

References cited in Dr. Durston's introduction to Dr. North's letter

-
- ¹ "Gun Law and Policy: Firearms and Armed Violence, Country by Country," GunPolicy.org, accessed November 18, 2019, <https://www.gunpolicy.org/>.
- ² 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>.
- ³ 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>.
- ⁴ Ashish P. Thakrar et al., "Child Mortality In The US And 19 OECD Comparator Nations: A 50-Year Time-Trend Analysis," *Health Affairs* 37, no. 1 (January 2018): 140–49, <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2017.0767>.
- ⁵ Michael J. North, "Gun Control in Great Britain after the Dunblane Shootings," in *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 185–93.
- ⁶ North.
- ⁷ "Gun Law and Policy: Firearms and Armed Violence, Country by Country," Gunpolicy.org, accessed July 31, 2019, <https://www.gunpolicy.org/>.