



Americans Against Gun Violence  
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2023 National High School Essay Contest \$250 Award Winner

A Student Attending High School in Maryland

(Other Identifying Information Withheld at Student's Request)

### **A Lifetime of School Shootings**

The anniversary of the Columbine High School shooting is only a few weeks away. I was born in 2004 and am adopted from China and came to the United States in 2004. I have to admit that I have known school shootings all of my life. I say that and sometimes I can't believe it.

I was talking to my dad about this fact after seeing the news of the recent school shooting of elementary school students in Nashville, Tennessee. The terror that these little kids must have felt had to have been unbelievable. These are the ages of kids who I babysit!! They are interested in making friends and playing on the playground and have no understanding why these things happen. Anyway, my dad reminded me that after the Orlando shooting (I'm also amazed that shootings have names that we remember) he told me, "Maddie, if you are ever scared after these shootings please come talk to Mommy or Daddy. It's normal to be scared so don't think you are different from anyone else."

My dad told me that my response was, "I'm not scared, shootings happen all the time." I was eleven years old when I said this. I have no memory of ever saying it. I was stunned when my dad told me that my answer to his request was a shrug of my shoulders. I can't believe that I felt so numb to shootings or that shootings, school or otherwise, were so commonplace that I would respond with such a lack of emotion.

I may not have been scared when I was eleven years old, but I'm scared now. I'll be scared today, tomorrow, next week, on the anniversary of the Columbine High School shooting, and until something is done about kids being killed by guns. I'm scared that the leading cause of death for children and youth in our country is gunshot wounds.<sup>1</sup> Kids are killed not only in school shootings but because of suicides, from accidents, as bystanders, and during crimes. Diseases such as cancer and accidents in automobiles take second to death by guns for children and youth in our country. No other developed country has this problem. Only the

## A Lifetime of School Shootings

United States.

Our country MUST pass stronger gun control laws and take a stand against gun violence. Children must feel safe going to school so they can learn, make friends and not worry about getting killed by a gun. Ludicrous proposals like arming teachers or nihilistic claims that nothing can be done are no excuse for the failure of our leaders to take definitive action to stop our country's epidemic of gun violence.

If there were an infectious disease epidemic that had become the leading cause of death among U.S. children and youth, you know that our country would mobilize and have the willpower to take definitive measures like it did to combat the AIDS and COVID epidemics. And if every other high income democratic country had found a way to reduce the rate at which children and youth were being killed by this epidemic to a tiny fraction of the U.S. rate, you could be sure that we would follow the examples set by those other countries.

We have the ability to stop the uniquely American epidemic of gun violence that's killing U.S. high school age youth at a rate that's 82 times higher than the rate for high school kids in other developed countries.<sup>2</sup> It's just a matter of having the willpower to do so. We must all demand that our elected leaders enact stringent gun control laws in the United States comparable to the laws in the all the other developed countries of the world.

### References

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<sup>1</sup> Jason E. Goldstick, Rebecca M. Cunningham, and Patrick M. Carter, "Current Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States," *New England Journal of Medicine* 386, no. 20 (May 19, 2022): 1955–56, <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMc2201761>.

<sup>2</sup> 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>.