



Americans Against Gun Violence
7862 Winding Way #151
Fair Oaks, CA 95628
(916) 668-4160
aagunv.org / info@aagunv.org

2025 Essay Contest

\$1,000 Scholarship Award Winner

(Student's name withheld at author's request)

DeBakey High School for Health Professions, Houston, Texas

What About Our Right to Live?

I shouldn't have to plan escape routes every time I enter a classroom.

But I do - just like millions of other students across the country. We know where the exits are. We know how to flip a desk, how to stay quiet, how to text, "I love you," with shaking fingers in case we never make it out. This is what it means to grow up in America now - not just with books and backpacks, but with the constant, suffocating fear that a gun could change everything in an instant.

That's why Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas's words from the 1972 case of *Adams v. Williams* hit me so hard: "There is no reason why all pistols should not be barred to everyone except the police." He dared to say what many refuse to - that the Second Amendment has been twisted into a weapon itself. We've built a culture where protecting guns is treated as more important than protecting children.

I used to believe the Second Amendment meant any American could own any gun, anytime. That's what I'd heard in school, on the news, and from politicians. But Justice Douglas's quote made me ask: where did that idea really come from? It turns out that for most of our history, the Second Amendment was tied to militias, not personal arsenals. It wasn't until 2008, in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, that the Supreme Court reinterpreted it as an individual right. That decision was recent - but the damage since then has been immense.

Gun violence is now the leading cause of death for children and teens in the U.S. No other developed country lives like this. In places like Australia and the UK, governments responded to mass shootings with serious action

- and those shootings stopped. In America, we offer “thoughts and prayers,” then loosen gun laws even more. We ask children to be brave, instead of asking adults to be responsible.

So I have to ask: whose freedom are we really protecting? Because when I see classmates crying during lockdown drills or hear about another school massacre on the news, it doesn't feel like freedom. It feels like abandonment. It feels like betrayal. And it makes me wonder if the so-called right to bear arms is being valued more than our actual right to live.

Justice Douglas was right: there is no reason we can't pass strict laws. There is no reason we can't change this. My generation is done waiting for someone else to fix it. We are tired of learning to survive instead of being allowed to thrive. We're not just survivors of this crisis - we're the solution. And we are demanding a future where our lives matter more than someone's gun.