



Americans Against Gun Violence  
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## 2025 Essay Contest

\$1,000 Scholarship Award Winner

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### **More Than a Constitutional Right - A Call for Life**

When I was little, I thought safety was as simple as going home and telling my mom if something was wrong. I used to get made fun of on the bus for my shoes, and she'd say, "Don't worry, mi amor, you're fine." And I was. Because I was safe. But now I'm older, and I know that for many kids in America, it's not that simple. You can't always run home to your mom when gun violence is everywhere - when it's in your schools, your malls, your neighborhoods. Safety is no longer a conversation. It's a question: will I make it home today?

Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas wrote in the 1972 case of *Adams v. Williams*:

*A powerful lobby dins into the ears of our citizenry that these gun purchases are constitutional rights protected by the Second Amendment, which reads, "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."*

*There is under our decisions no reason why stiff state laws governing the purchase and possession of pistols may not be enacted....There is no reason why all pistols should not be barred to everyone except the police.*

Some people read that and get angry. They say the Second Amendment guarantees the right to own a gun. But we live in a country founded on the principle that we all have certain inalienable rights, and that among these rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Our country's epidemic of gun violence, which is now the leading cause of death for U.S. children and youth, steals all of these rights from us and makes us even afraid to go to school.

In my community, I've seen how gun violence steals futures. I volunteer at

Valverde Elementary in southwest Denver, where many of the students are young, bilingual, and full of dreams. But some have already heard or seen gunshots outside their homes. I tutor them around math, but what they really deserve is a world where they can focus on numbers - not on staying alive. Through my work with CO Feeds Kids, Project C.U.R.E., and TOPSoccer, I've seen how powerful communities can be when they come together. But I've also learned something else: no amount of volunteer hours can replace the lives lost to a bullet. That takes policy. That takes courage. That takes young people like us demanding change.

People say gun violence is too political, too complicated, too tied to rights. But as a future doctor, I see it differently. It's a public health crisis. It's about preserving life - especially in underserved communities like the one I want to serve as a cardiologist. The heart can only keep beating if the body is safe. That includes the community body.

Some argue banning handguns goes too far. I say not going far enough is costing us more. According to other countries with strict gun laws - like Japan or the UK - tighter regulations mean fewer deaths. It's not about fear. It's about facts. It's about protecting children who just want to grow up.

So what does justice mean to me? Justice is waking up in a world where you're not scared to wear your favorite shoes, walk to class, or raise your hand in a classroom. Justice is kids like those at Valverde knowing they are worth protecting. Justice is not an opinion. It's action. And I'm ready to act - not with just my words, but with my future. One step at a time, one voice at a time, we can make sure the right to life means something again. Because if we don't, who will?