



Americans Against Gun Violence
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2026 National High School Essay Contest \$100 Winner

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This Ends With Us

“The thought of having armed guards and ‘lockdown drills’ never crossed our minds.”

I read that, and it feels like a completely different reality from mine.

I am from North Philadelphia. Lockdowns are not something that we think about. They are something we live. In school, it is routine. Light off. Doors locked. Silence. We know exactly what to do because we have practiced too many times. But what people do not always understand is that it does not end at school.

There were nights we stayed inside because someone had just been shot down the block. Times where police lights filled the streets because they were chasing someone through neighborhood. Moments when you hear yelling, sirens, then silence, and you already know something serious just happened. No one has to explain it to you. You learn quickly to stay inside, stay quiet, and stay alert. That is not something you should have to learn as a child, but for many of us, it’s normal.

So when I read about the response to the Dunblane Primary School mass shooting, what stands out isn’t just the tragedy, it is what came after. They made changes. They chose to protect their children in a real, tangible way. In the United States, it feels like we have accepted a system where students are prepared for the possibility of violence instead of being protected from it.

That is the difference. They chose prevention. We have normalized survival.

And that is not something that I am willing to accept.

As a student, this shapes everything. You are trying to focus on your future, your

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goals, your education, but there is always that awareness in the background. Always that question of what if.

Do I believe that the United States should have stronger gun laws? Yes. Because safety should not be something we have to adapt to. It should be guaranteed.

The biggest challenge is not a lack of solutions. It is a lack of urgency.

Young people, especially those growing up in places like North Philadelphia, understand this in a way that cannot be ignored. We are not speaking from theory. We are speaking from experience.

We should not have to grow up learning how to survive gun violence.

We should be able to grow up without it.

I grew up learning how to stay safe. My children will grow up owing they already are safe.