

“Examining the Practices and Profits of Gun Manufacturers”
Committee on Oversight and Reform
10:00 AM, Wednesday, July 27, 2022
Statement for the Record
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

Thank you, Chairwoman Maloney, for calling this hearing at a moment of peril and mourning for communities across the country. Today’s hearing is an important opportunity for this Committee—and the American people—to hear first-hand how gun violence shatters lives, upends communities, and harms our nation’s safety and public health, all while gun manufacturers remain insulated from liability for the carnage they create. The overwhelming majority of Americans support the ABCs of gun control:

- **“A” Assault** weapons and high-capacity magazine bans,
- **“B” Background** checks on every purchase, and
- **“C” Closing** the loopholes that let the wrong people buy guns.

Republicans in Congress, however, have obstructed efforts to pass gun violence prevention legislation supported by the majority of Americans. We cannot and will not bend to extremists and gun manufacturers who oppose all action to curb gun violence.

Last month, I proudly joined 222 of my colleagues in the House who voted to pass the Protecting Our Kids Act (H.R. 7910). That legislation marks the first bipartisan gun violence prevention law enacted in decades. The legislation raised the purchasing age for semi-automatic weapons from 18 to 21 years old and finally cracked down on gun trafficking, straw purchases, and ghost guns. The Protecting Our Kids Act will also close the bump stock loophole, strengthen safe storage requirements to protect children from accidental shootings, outlaw high-capacity magazines, and require an annual report of demographic data of those determined ineligible to purchase guns. The Protecting Our Kids Act should serve as a springboard for future action to combat gun violence.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), firearms killed more than 45,000 Americans in 2020. Gun homicides rose more than 35 percent between 2019 and 2020, and today, the leading cause of death for American children is gun violence. Not cancer, not car crashes—but gun violence. In 2022, mass shootings have far outpaced days on the calendar—with more than 271 senseless acts of indiscriminate violence already committed this year. Among young people, firearm suicide has reached its highest rate in more than 20 years. While the United States accounts for just four percent of the world population, it accounts for 35 percent of global firearm suicides.

The party that brands itself “pro-life” appears comfortable with the fact that a child born in the United States is 25 times more likely to be killed in a gun homicide than a child born in other high-income countries.

Buffalo, Uvalde and Highland Park are just the latest members of a growing collection of communities ravaged by gun violence. In 2007, while I was serving as Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, a gunman murdered 32 people at Virginia Tech, including six of my constituents, in what was at the time the worst gun massacre in American history. I’ve seen the unimaginable loss felt by communities and loved ones of gun violence victims. I am committed to finding ways to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous individuals, including through the enactment of the Safe Homefront Act – bipartisan legislation I wrote to fix a broken system at the Department of Defense that failed repeatedly to

report to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System individuals who should have been disqualified from having firearms. Those failures led to avoidable tragedies, but the reforms included in the Safe Homefront Act will save lives.

Gun violence has bloodied our nation's schools, grocery stores, and places of worship. Inexcusably, gun manufacturers are given blanket immunity for when their products are used in to commit mass murder of lawful citizens.

This Committee investigated the forces perpetuating gun violence in America for several years. We uncovered an industry unrepentant about pursuing profit over the health and safety of this nation. Today we seek answers from the manufacturers of semi-automatic rifles who market and sell the weapons used to conduct the deadliest massacres in this country's history. Gun manufacturers make and sell deadly weapons that have one violent purpose: massive carnage. All the while, they block any efforts to enact reforms and hold those responsible accountable for the massacres these guns were built to carry out.

In 2005, two years before the Virginia Tech massacre—after intense lobbying from gun manufacturers—Congress passed the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA). The law took unprecedented action to provide blanket immunity to firearm manufacturers. Unfortunately, constitutional challenges to the PLCAA have fallen unsuccessful. Thirty-five states, including my home state of Virginia, have enacted similar laws that provide undue protections to gun manufacturers at the state level. Prior to the passage of the PLCAA, plaintiffs could litigate guns' safety defects through civil litigation and financially incentivize the gun industry to adopt new safety measures. The PLCAA removed this method of accountability.

The organization that represents many gun manufacturers, the National Rifle Association (NRA), may be headquartered in my district, but I will never be their Representative. Well-resourced NRA lobbyists have convinced state legislatures and the federal government to enact special legal protections for gun manufacturers, creating accountability carve-outs that permit them to evade liability. These provisions prevent the federal government from collecting the data and evidence it needs to craft effective policies to quell this public health crisis. If tobacco, gas, and pharmaceutical companies can be sued for the destructive results of their products, gun manufacturers should not escape accountability. I am proud to earn an "F" rating from the NRA. I will not be party to an industry built on the pain and suffering of American families and communities. It is past time to put an end to the gun lobby's obstruction of firearms research and reform—and to immediately enact measures that rightfully place lives and communities above corporate profits.

Congress must repeal the blanket immunity gifted to gun manufacturers. Between 80-90% of Americans support universal background checks, 77% of Americans believe a family member should be able to petition a court to issue an extreme risk protection order, and 70% of Americans believe police should be able to file a similar petition. Bans on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines have an approval rating from more than 60% of Americans. A vast majority of Americans support commonsense reforms. Congress must continue to pass meaningful gun violence prevention legislation to save American lives. That is why I am proud to be a cosponsor of H.R. 2814, the Equal Access to Justice for Victims of Gun Violence Act, a bill that would repeal the liability shield for gun manufacturers established by the PLCAA. Enacting these measures and holding gun manufacturers accountable is what the public wants and what our children need.