

My name is Nicole, and on December 14th, 2012, I was a second grader at Sandy Hook Elementary School. I was sitting on the carpet with my classmates waiting for my teacher to give us directions for the day as we heard what sounded like large metal pans being smashed together come from the hall. My teacher quickly ran to the door to see if anyone was in the hall, and pulled two students into our classroom. She then shut the door and turned off the lights. As the gunshots continued to ring through the hallways we huddled by our cubbies and my teacher pulled over a desk and grabbed a book to try and read us so we would calm down. As she was reading she began heavily shaking and I knew we were in danger. I felt a strong sense of nausea come over me and thought I would be the first to die if the gunman got into our classroom because I was close to the door. We then heard a knock and shake on the door handle which was terrifying because we didn't know who it was. After deciding to open the door we were evacuated out of the school by the police and taken to the firehouse nearby to reunite with our families. The firehouse was chaotic and everyone was running around, looking for their kids, as everything was still so unclear. I then went home that day and my town endured the most horrific aftermath after finding out 26 beautiful, innocent souls were taken from us that day. In less than five minutes, an AR-15 fired 154 bullets killing 26 people. How do we continue to allow this?

I have grown up in a world where the unimaginable happens over and over again. I am here not only because of the trauma I have endured in the past, but also because I'm terrified of it happening again in the future. We live in the constant aftermath of inaction from our lawmakers that we voted into office to do everything in their power to protect us.

I have met amazing people in this fight both survivors and victims of gun violence, which is a community that has grown far too big. We have been pushing for an assault weapons ban which is a crucial step to decreasing these mass shootings with unacceptable death tolls. We also need red flag laws implemented in all 50 states, as well as federal safe storage laws for all gun owners, and universal background checks. That is just the beginning.

We see time and time again that these shootings are pure acts of hate. Buffalo, Uvalde, Pittsburgh, Parkland, whether it is racial inequity, religion, socioeconomic backgrounds, high schools, grocery stores, the cold grip of gun violence has touched far too many and has no boundaries. America is alone in this battle to live freely for a reason. Our lawmakers have not taken bold, lifesaving, crucial action to protect what the majority of Americans believe in, common sense safety measures. I am here today to beg you to please, do everything in your power to enact measures that prevent everything you care about being lost within seconds, because with no action it is not a matter of if, it is a matter of who is next. We ran out of time over a decade ago and we need to act now.