

Testimony of Lauren Hogg, Co-Founder of March For Our Lives

Engaging the Community: Perspectives on School Security Hearing

Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Subcommittee (Committee on Homeland Security)

September 26th, 2019

Chairman Thompson, Chairman Payne, Ranking Member King, Ranking Member Rodgers, and members of the subcommittee, thank you all for allowing me the opportunity to give a student's perspective on school security. My name is Lauren Hogg and I am a cofounder of March For Our Lives, a junior in high school, and a concerned student who just wants to survive high school both metaphorically and literally. I hope that this testimony aids in your efforts to protect students from all zip codes and all races from going through what myself and my classmates have in the wake of surviving a school shooting.

I want to preface my testimony by saying that although I am honored to be here today, I would not be here if not for the horrendous events that took place on February 14, 2018 at my high school Marjory Stoneman Douglas. 34 of my classmates, friends, teachers and coaches were injured, 17 of them fatally shot with an AR-15. Thankfully many of my classmates and I made it home that day, but we carry with us the weight of what I call active trauma. Imagine it as the recurring stages of grief every time yet another senseless shooting happens. It deeply saddens me to say that this heaviness will be something that stays with us the rest of our lives.

I was born after Columbine and I was 9 years old when Sandy Hook occurred, so for most of my life I have been force-fed the importance of school security. I still remember the first week back to school after the Sandy Hook shooting. I was in fourth grade and I remember spending the first hour of school watching my teachers shoes on the rainbow carpet as she tried -- to no avail -- to explain what a code red drill was to a room of 4th graders. As blood chilling as the explanation of new security measures was I never thought twice about them until four years later when my friend Alaina posed a question about why we were having the drills. In 8th grade Alaina Petty sat in front of me in American History. If I am being honest, we never really talked about security at school in the context of preventing mass shootings until one day when our friend Austin returned to school after surviving the Fort Lauderdale airport shooting. Together our little friend group contemplated the effectiveness of our school safety procedures while standing in the adjacent corner of our classroom every three months. Nearly a year later, the three of us were at school as nervous freshman on Valentine's day when we once again went through a code red drill; the only difference was that only two of us made it home this time. Alaina was 14 years old when she was killed.

The week after Valentine's day was full of many things, it was full of tears, it was full of funerals, and it was full of much talk around school security. I'll never forget the first morning back at school. When we first arrived to the walkway into our campus, we were welcomed back by what seemed like every armed police officer in the county. It was truly a sea of black and blue uniforms, they thought they were making us feel safe and for that I am grateful, but the sight of more men carrying guns made many of us feel sick not secure.

When we finally made it through the newly implemented single entrance after waiting in a line of students at a school of nearly 4500, we were greeted with things that we had never previously experienced at school. There were checkpoints, clear backpacks, and new smiling faces of School Resource Officers (SRO's) holding guns in one hand and waving us in with the other. Also I feel as though it is pertinent to know that, almost every safety implementation was put in place without the consultation of even a single student. Our administrators were our

leaders, supposed to represent and implement what we as students feel, but much like political leaders so often do, forgot to listen to their constituents before speaking on behalf of them.

Our school which once was considered a safe haven of learning by many of us, was turned into a place of imprisonment. Additionally, much like our national incarceration system, our school when flooded with resource officers that ironically were considered safety precautions became a place where my black and brown classmates were disproportionately penalized and targeted at nearly three times the rate of us white students¹ (Appendix A). Simply put, schools when over militarized and made to seem like prisons instead of places of learning, embed in us students the idea that violence is something to be expected at school, and that is no mindset for a child to learn in. Following the tragedy at my high school, numerous individuals, including the Secretary of Education looked to increase the presence of firearms in schools. I, as an individual, and as a representative of March For Our Lives strongly oppose the notion that arming teachers will make schools safer.

There is a fine line between proper security and militarization. As you examine this line, I urge you to consult those most affected: students. Having me here as a witness is an important first step, but students must continue to be consulted. As you examine that line, I urge you to consider noninvasive proactive measures, not simply punitive reactive measures. We need to invest in mental health resources of trained mental health professionals, rather than relying solely on academic counselors or School Resource Officers (SRO's). Such academic counselors usually tell us they don't have time to speak about mental health, or that they have to focus on what they consider more important things like getting into college.

And to those who suggest that the solution is to simply hire more School Resource Officers or to arm SRO's, let me remind you that the armed SRO at my high school did nothing as 17 of my classmates and teachers were murdered. That SRO has in fact been charged with child neglect for his inaction². It was our unarmed football coach, Aaron Feis, who protected my classmates and lost his life in the process.

Furthermore, school safety cannot be addressed fully without addressing our nation's gun violence epidemic. Given this I encourage you all to look into March For Our Lives' comprehensive bold plan, *A Peace Plan For A Safer America* (Appendix B).

Instead of promoting certain punitive safety measures that, which constitutes putting a bandaid on a bullet wounds, I ask you to think of what is actually beneficial to students. I hope with all of my being that gun violence prevention legislation is passed so that perhaps someday we won't have to be having hearings on school safety. All together I hope that when it comes to school security I won't have someday hear a student half my age claim that they were born after Marjory Stoneman Douglas and grew up being force fed ineffective safety procedures until the day that they went through mass shooting of their own. Us students are tired of being tired. Our future, and the future of this country is at stake. The future of this country's safety is in your hands.

Thank you.

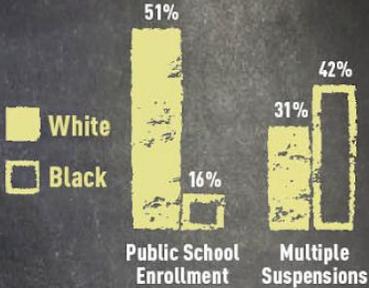
¹ Lopez, German. "Black Kids Are Way More Likely to Be Punished in School than White Kids, Study Finds." *Vox.com*, Vox, 5 Apr. 2018, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/4/5/17199810/school-discipline-race-racism-gao>.

² "Ex-SRO Charged with Child Neglect for 'Inaction' during Parkland Massacre." *WFLA*, 4 June 2019, <https://www.wfla.com/news/florida/ex-sro-charged-with-child-neglect-for-inaction-during-parkland-massacre/>.

SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

School disciplinary policies disproportionately affect Black students.

Zero-tolerance discipline has resulted in Black students facing disproportionately harsher punishment than white students in public schools.¹



Category	White	Black
Public School Enrollment	51%	16%
Multiple Suspensions	31%	42%

Black students represent **31%** of school-related arrests²

Black students are suspended and expelled **3x** more than white students.³

Students suspended or expelled for a discretionary violation are nearly three times more likely to be in contact with the juvenile justice system the following year.⁴



BROWN AT 60: STILL SEPARATE. STILL UNEQUAL.



1. Data Snapshot: <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf>
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. Breaking School Rules http://csj.justicecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Breaking_Schools_Rules_Report_Final.pdf

Appendix B: March For Our Lives' *Peace Plan for a Safer America* Executive Summary

Every day in America, more than 100 lives are taken by the deadly epidemic of gun violence.³ Among young people, gun violence has become a top cause of death, second only to drug overdoses.⁴ It has many root causes, including hate, poverty, and despair. It's a deeply intersectional issue, inextricably bound with our long journey for racial justice, economic justice, immigrant rights, and the rights of our LGBTQ allies. And it's amplified by the societal belief that a gun can solve our problems. Gun violence is destroying our generation. This is simply unacceptable. That's why, as survivors and students of March For Our Lives, we believe it's time for a Peace Plan for a Safer America.

The next President must act with a fierce urgency to call this crisis what it is: a national public health emergency. They must acknowledge that the level of gun violence in the U.S. is unprecedented for a developed nation⁵ – and only bold, new solutions can move the needle on the rates of gun injuries and deaths. They must recognize that gun violence has many faces in our communities, from rural suicides to intimate partner violence to urban youth violence to violence driven by white supremacist ideologies. And they must commit to holding an unpatriotic gun lobby and gun industry accountable not just for weakening our nation's gun laws, but also for illegal behavior in self-dealing⁴ that offends and contradicts America's vast majority of responsible gun owners.

We believe in C.H.A.N.G.E. – six bold steps that the next Presidential Administration and Congress must take to address this national gun violence epidemic:



³ Mervosh, Sarah. "Nearly 40,000 People Died From Guns in U.S. Last Year, Highest in 50 Years." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 18 Dec. 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/18/us/gun-deaths.html>.

⁴ Parsons, Chelsea, et al. "America's Youth Under Fire." *Center for American Progress*, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2018/05/04/450343/americas-youth-fire/>.

⁵ Parsons, Chelsea, et al. "America's Youth Under Fire: America's Youth Under Fire." *American Progress*, Center For American Progress, 2 May 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2018/05/04/450343/americas-youth-fire/>.

1. CHANGE THE STANDARD OF GUN OWNERSHIP: Advocate and pass legislation to raise the national standard for gun ownership: a national licensing and registry system that promotes responsible gun ownership; a ban on assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, and other weapons of war; policies to disarm gun owners who pose a risk to themselves or others; and a national gun buy-back program to reduce the estimated 265-393 million firearms in circulation by at least 30%.

2. HALVE THE RATE OF GUN DEATHS IN 10 YEARS: Mobilize an urgent and comprehensive federal response: declare a national emergency around gun violence and announce an audacious goal to reduce gun injuries and deaths by 50% in 10 years, thereby saving up to 200,000 American lives.

3. ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE GUN LOBBY AND INDUSTRY: Hold the gun lobby and industry accountable for decades of illegal behavior and misguided policies intended to shield only themselves; reexamine the District of Columbia v. Heller interpretation of the Second Amendment; initiate both FEC and IRS investigations into the NRA, and fully repeal the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act.

4. NAME A DIRECTOR OF GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION: Appoint a National Director of Gun Violence Prevention (GVP) who reports directly to the President, with the mandate to operationalize our federal goals and empower existing federal agencies such as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) – agencies that have all been structurally weakened by the gun lobby. The National Director of GVP would begin by overseeing a down payment of \$250 million in annual funding for research by the CDC and other federal agencies on gun violence prevention.

5. GENERATE COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS: Fully fund targeted interventions addressing the intersectional dimensions of gun violence, including community-based urban violence reduction programs, suicide prevention programs, domestic violence prevention programs, mental and behavioral health service programs, and programs to address police violence in our communities.

6. EMPOWER THE NEXT GENERATION: Automatically register eligible voters and mail voter registration cards to all Americans when they turn 18. Create the “Safety Corps,” a Peace Corps for gun violence prevention. The younger generations are disproportionately affected by gun violence. They should have a say in how their country solves this epidemic.

To read the Peace Plan in its entirety, visit www.marchforourlives.com/peace-plan.