

Testimony of Michael E. Grady
Senior Pastor, Prince of Peace Christian Fellowship
El Paso, TX

U.S. House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
An Unending Crisis: Essential Steps to Reducing Gun Violence and Mass Shootings
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Thank you, Madam Chairwoman and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to share my story with you today. My name is Michael Grady, and over the course of my life I've been blessed to hold several titles. I am the Pastor of Prince of Peace Christian Fellowship Church in El Paso, Texas, and for nearly three decades I served in the Chaplaincy of the United States Army. For the last 47 years, I've been married to my wife Jeneverlyn, and I am the father of 3 wonderful daughters.

I'm here with you today because of what happened on August 3, 2019. On that morning, I was at home, while my wife and daughter were at a shopping center just minutes away from my home. At 10:45am, time seemingly came to a halt when I received a panicked call from my wife telling me to come to Walmart because Michelle, our middle daughter, had been shot 3 times.

Shot three times. My daughter?

It was as if my wife was speaking a foreign language because the words did not immediately register. How could Michelle have been shot? Serving 27 years in the Army only for my daughter to be shot in our own community seemed incomprehensible.

But I snapped out of my disbelief, and immediately jumped in the car with my daughter Jackie for what was the longest drive of my life, to a Walmart that was just 5 minutes away. When we arrived, our neighborhood shopping center looked more like a war zone you'd see on the evening news. We ran past first responders, and past people who appeared to have already lost their lives, desperately searching for Michelle while fearing the worst. Finally, we came upon my wife and Michelle, who was shot 3 times and in critical condition. She was rushed to the hospital and thank God, she survived. Unfortunately, 23 other people did not make it.

The date on the calendar may change, but that day is in many ways a day that never ends. Its consequences will forever be felt. For those who lost a loved one, there are constant reminders of what was stolen. For the survivors, there is lasting physical and emotional pain. My daughter is as strong and resilient as anyone, but she still walks with a cane and deals with the trauma of what she experienced that day.

When I think about that day and its aftermath, I think about choices. Initially, I thought about the shooter's choices. His choice to buy a gun, his choice to get in his car, his choice to murder

people because of the color of their skin and their country of origin, and all the chances he had to turn around but chose not to.

But now I think about the uplifting choices that others have made since then. I chose to get involved with and became the Chairman of the local chapter of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice. Through that work and my ministry, I've met countless people affected by gun violence, most in incidents that never make headlines. They've chosen to share their stories and relive their trauma in the hopes that it will compel our elected leaders to take action.

What I endured/survived/witnessed on August 3, 2019 occurs far too often in our nation. Just 13 hours after my daughter was shot, another mass shooting occurred in Dayton, Ohio. That same weekend in Chicago, 40 people were shot, 3 fatally, in a series of shootings. Gun violence destroys families and communities every single day in this country. This violence is not inevitable. Action can be taken to give communities relief from this epidemic of violence. Policymakers and leaders like you can take action and pass common sense safety measures to prevent these tragedies.

Universal background checks would help ensure that people who are not legally able to buy or possess firearms cannot easily circumvent the law by finding a private seller, online or elsewhere, who will sell them a gun without a background check. Fortunately, the House has passed a bill to close this dangerous loophole, and the Senate should as well.

Perpetrators of mass violence often present warning signs, indicating that they are at risk of harming themselves or others. Extreme risk laws, also known as red flag laws, allow family members or law enforcement officers to petition a court to temporarily prevent someone showing signs of dangerous behavior or suicidality from possessing or purchasing firearms. These laws have saved lives, preventing mass shootings as well as suicides in states that already have these procedures available.

The nexus of firearms and hate is deadly. I am a witness to what happens when someone filled with racist hatred is armed. The shooter in El Paso was not from our community. He chose to arm himself with an arsenal of ammunition and an assault rifle before driving several hours. He targeted my community as the site for his hate-fueled attack, killing 23 people and injuring 23 others because of the color of their skin. What happened on August 3, 2019 was the deadliest attack on the Latinx community in modern history. Violent extremists and hate groups often use firearms as tools of violence and intimidation. Hate crimes are on the rise; the vitriol and venomous hatred often manifests in violent actions. It is imperative for the safety of all communities that our policymakers address this problem swiftly and ensure that people who perpetrate acts of hate are not legally able to arm themselves.

In El Paso, the shooter came armed with an assault rifle and large-capacity magazines, enabling him to fire dozens of rounds, reload his weapon quickly, and fire multiple shots again—equipped to do as much damage as possible. Large-capacity magazines can hold as many as 30, 40, 50, and even 100 rounds of ammunition. These devices enable a shooter to injure and

kill a large number of people before they need to pause to reload. Congress should ban large-capacity magazines to reduce the potential lethality of firearms and prevent perpetrators of mass violence from firing dozens of rounds without reloading.

As an Army veteran, I know how dangerous and lethal assault weapons are, and I know there is no reason for them to ever be used against innocent members of the public shopping in a store. The shooter chose that weapon because of its firing capability. Assault weapons are the weapon of choice for mass shooters because of their capacity to inflict immense damage over a short span of time. These weapons have shown time and time again that in the hands of a person intent on causing harm, they will do grievous damage. We need our political leaders to act and treat these firearms like the dangerous weapons they are—regulate them the same way we regulate machine guns.

Gun violence shouldn't be a common experience in communities all over America. Passing gun safety laws, like the ones I mentioned above, will prevent families from losing loved ones or enduring the physical and psychological trauma of a gunshot injury. And now today, I think about the choice before this Congress. I hope you will choose to pass commonsense gun laws, make investments in communities that will save lives, and reduce the chances that another family will go through what mine has.