

May 20, 2021

Hearing Before the United States House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime,
Terrorism, and Homeland Security
“An Unending Crisis: Essential Steps to Reducing Gun Violence and Mass
Shootings”

Written Testimony of Fred Guttenberg
Gun Violence Survivor, Jesse and Jaime's Dad

Chairwoman Jackson Lee, Ranking Member Biggs, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Fred Guttenberg. I am a father of 2 children, Jesse and Jaime. On February 14th, 2018, my daughter Jaime Guttenberg was murdered alongside 13 other children and three of their teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. My son Jesse, now 20, lives with the permanent scars of having heard his sister get shot. I am a father who lives with the sound of that single shot severing my daughter's spinal cord. I am a father who hopes his daughter died instantly, otherwise, that means she suffered. My daughter will be 14 forever. My wife and I watch as all of the other kids post pictures of going to prom and college acceptances this year. We are happy for them, but we break down and cry, because Jaime is not with them. This day has forever transformed my family and I have since dedicated my life to preventing gun violence in this country. I have been told, even by some at this hearing, that I hate the 2nd Amendment and that I am a gun grabber, simply because I want to save lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, I have family members and friends who still own guns and my son has gone shooting with them.

My daughter was killed in a mass shooting—the kind we have seen over and over again in elementary, middle, and high schools, colleges, concerts, movie theaters, grocery stores, bars, businesses, the list on—where a shooter is armed with an assault weapon and large capacity magazines, and a dozen lives or more are stolen in mere seconds. These weapons are designed specifically to kill as many people as possible as fast as possible, and that's why they have become the weapon of choice for mass murderers. They were designed for the battlefield — assault weapons purchased by civilians are just as lethal as those made for our troops. Congress must take action to ban both assault weapons and large capacity magazines which have killed thousands of innocent Americans.

Mass shootings, like the one where my daughter was murdered, get a lot of attention, but they account for just a small percentage of American gun violence. 40,000 people die every year, that's over 100 people every day, in incidents of domestic and community violence, hate crimes, suicide,

and unintentional shootings all across the country.¹ My friends, Kristin and Mike Song, know all too well the tragic consequences of what happens when a firearm is not safely stored. In 2018, their son Ethan, just 15-years-old, was unintentionally shot and killed after accessing an unsecured gun in a neighbor's house. The gun was one of three kept in a Tupperware container in a bedroom closet. This is not an anomaly in America: every day, eight children and teens are unintentionally shot by an unsecured, loaded firearm found in the home.² It's estimated that 4.6 million children live in homes with at least one unsecured gun.³ No one should know the pain of losing a child to a gun, we can and must do better.

I've been partnering with Brady, one of the nation's oldest gun violence prevention organizations, and they have led the End Family Fire program, a national education campaign by gun owners, for gun owners, on the importance of safe storage. Family Fire is a shooting involving an improperly stored or misused gun found in the home, and it's one of the biggest contributors to gun deaths each year. Safe firearm storage provides a lifesaving barrier between children or those in crisis from accessing guns. Firearm owners who keep their guns locked or unloaded are at least 60% less likely⁴ to die from firearm-related suicide and adolescents in these household have a significantly lower risk⁵ of firearm suicide or of being unintentional shot.

Congress has policy options for increasing safe storage, something which the vast majority of responsible gun owners already agree is important. Researchers have found that even a modest intervention that motivates gun owners to safely store their guns could reduce youth firearm deaths by up to 32%.⁶ For instance, Congress could pass legislation creating tax incentives to promote safe storage, like the Prevent Family Fire Act, which had broad bipartisan support last year. Congress could also take steps to educate the public more broadly about the benefits and best practices of safe storage, and could even require gun dealers to post that information where they sell guns. In 2005, Congress required gun dealers to provide safe storage devices when they sold handguns, there is no reason not to expand that law to cover all guns.⁷

¹ Gramlich, John. (2019). What the data says about gun deaths in the U.S. *Pew Research Center*.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/16/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>.

² Web-Based Injury Statistics Query Reporting System (WISQARS) Fatal Injury Reports and Nonfatal Injury Reports, National, Regional and States, 1999 to 2017. *National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal.html> and <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/nonfatal.html>.

³ Azreal, Deborah, et al. (2018). Firearm Storage in Gun-Ownning Households with Children: Results of a 2015 National Survey. *Journal of Urban Health*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11524-018-0261-7>.

⁴ Shenassa, Edmond D., et al. (2004). Safer storage of firearms at home and risk of suicide: a study of protective factors in a nationally representative sample. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*. <https://jech.bmj.com/content/58/10/841>.

⁵ Grossman, David C., et al. (2005). Gun Storage Practices and Risk of Youth Suicide and Unintentional Firearm Injuries. *JAMA*. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/200330?resultClick=1>.

⁶ Monuteaux, Michael C., et al. (2019). Association of Increased Safe Household Firearm Storage With Firearm Suicide and Unintentional Death Among US Youths. *JAMA Pediatrics*. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2733158?resultClick=1>.

⁷ Child Safety Lock Act, 18 U.S.C. § 922(z). <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/922>.

Senator Blumenthal and Congresswoman Delauro have also introduced Ethan's Law, named in honor of Ethan Song, which would create a legal obligation to safely store firearms if a minor might have access to them. Had this common-sense law been in place in 2018, Ethan's life could have been spared. I am grateful for my dear friends Kristin and Mike, but I truly wish we had never had occasion to meet.

These policies would have a measurable impact on people's lives, but there is more that Congress can do to protect public safety without affecting the rights of law-abiding citizens. This body has now twice passed legislation to expand and strengthen background checks for gun sales. Congress should also expand background checks to cover ammunition sales. Jaime's Law, named in honor of my daughter, would do just that, and prevent dangerous individuals from getting their hands on ammunition.

It is not acceptable that so many lives are lost to gun violence in this country, and it doesn't have to be this way. I urge you all to take action and save lives. I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today and I look forward to your questions.