



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

For science. For action. For health.

March 22, 2021

The Honorable Dick Durbin
Chair
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Durbin:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals that champions the health of all people and communities, I am pleased to submit this letter for the record for the March 23 Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on Constitutional and Common Sense Steps to Reduce Gun Violence.

Gun violence is one of the leading preventable causes of death in the nation. In 2019, 39,707 individuals died as a result of gun violence and many more suffered nonfatal gun injuries. After years of delay, it is time for Congress to act and take a comprehensive public health approach to addressing this growing crisis. Our nation has waited far too long to take on this devastating problem in our communities and we can wait no longer.

APHA strongly supports H.R. 8, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2021, and S. 529, the Background Check Expansion Act. This commonsense legislation, recently passed on a bipartisan basis in the House, would expand the current firearm background check system to cover all commercial firearm sales. Current law, which only requires background checks for guns purchased from federally licensed dealers, is inadequate and contains significant gaps that provide easy access to weapons for felons, domestic abusers, the seriously mentally ill and others prohibited from owning firearms. We strongly support this legislation which would close these senseless loopholes by requiring the same background check for all commercial gun sales including those at gun shows, on the internet and through classified ads.

We also strongly support continued funding to conduct public health research into firearm morbidity and mortality prevention. We thank Congress for providing a total of \$25 million in FY 2020 and FY 2021 which was split evenly between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute of Health. With this funding, CDC has made 18 awards for two- and three-year projects to improve scientific understanding of firearm-related violence and to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of strategies to prevent gun violence. NIH is currently funding research on the determinants of firearm injury, the identification of those at risk, and the evaluation of innovative interventions. In FY 2022, APHA and other leading public health and medical organizations are calling on Congress to increase funding to CDC and NIH for firearm morbidity and mortality prevention research to a total of \$50 million. Robust and sustained funding is critical to ensuring these agencies can continue to fund the evidence-based research that is a key component in helping to reduce firearm-related deaths and injuries in the nation.

We have waited too long to act on commonsense legislation to protect everyone in our nation from the threat of gun violence. We stand ready to work with you and your colleagues to pass this and other critical legislation to reduce gun violence in the United States.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "G".

Georges C. Benjamin, MD
Executive Director