

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 4, 2022

The Honorable Joseph Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NE
Washington, DC 20510

Dear President Biden,

Thank you for your efforts to address the immense toll that gun violence continues to take across the country. I write to highlight its impact in my district NY-16 in particular, and to call on you to use your executive authority to take further urgently needed action on gun violence. The federal government must use all available powers to help communities combat violence and heal from the trauma it leaves behind. I'm committed to working with my colleagues to advance legislation out of Congress, including the lifesaving H.R. 8 and H.R.1446. Until that work is finalized, it is critical to put in place executive actions to comprehensively address gun violence holistically as a public health crisis.

Recently, a group of 43 advocacy organizations sent you a letter listing executive actions you could take to help prevent gun violence that I strongly support.¹ The letter urges that you use executive action to address a number of gun violence-related issues, including the need to:

- **Identify Gun Violence Prevention as a Priority Issue:** A whole of government approach to eliminating gun violence requires creating an Interagency Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and putting in place senior-level White House officials to coordinate these efforts.
- **Address Gun Violence as a Public Health Crisis:** Declaring gun violence a Public Health Emergency will give HHS and other relevant agencies including the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation more latitude and access to more resources to stop the rise in violence.

¹ Woodcome, Tricia. "43 Groups Call on the Biden Administration To Take Bold, Executive Action To Combat Gun Violence Epidemic." *Center for American Progress*. Feb. 23, 2022. Accessed here: https://americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Executive-Actions-for-GVP-2022-Letter-Final.pdf?_ga=2.168467873.123383333.1645636341-2144169128.1643138322

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- **Strengthen the Background Check System:** Actions here should include clarifying which gun sellers need federal firearms licenses issued by the ATF, improving background check alert systems, and closing loopholes that allow unlicensed sellers to sell privately owned guns.
- **Enhance Oversight of the Gun Industry:** Improving oversight by modernizing the process to become a gun dealer, strengthening record keeping, publicly issuing an annual report on violations by parts of the gun supply chain, and leveraging federal procurement power to enforce safe business practices to help limit gun trafficking.
- **Implement Measures to Address Domestic and International Gun Trafficking:** Reversing Trump era rules on gun exports and 3D-printed guns and re-signing the UN Arms Trade Treaty to drastically slow the flow of illegal weapons.
- **Focus on firearm suicide:** Tracking suicide statistics and providing resources to the suicide prevention lifeline staff and medical professionals would save lives, especially of our veterans.
- **Ensure the safety of all students:** Directing more funding towards student violence and suicide prevention as well as mental health professionals in schools would help foster a nurturing environment for students that reduces violence.
- **Disarm Armed White Supremacists and Protect Peaceful Protests and Voting:** Taking the threat posed by white supremacists seriously by aggressively prosecuting violent extremists like those responsible for the January 6th Insurrection and encouraging the use of extreme risk protection orders to prevent extremists from arming themselves would help reduce gun violence and protect our democracy.

As a former educator, a father, and the member elected to serve New York's 16th Congressional District, I am especially concerned about the impact of gun violence on our children, which is on the rise. Earlier this month, a high school in Mount Vernon went on lockdown just before dismissal because of gunfire outside - a far too typical experience of violence that does not get included in the most cited school shooting statistics.² When going to school includes the risk of being shot or hearing gunfire, we can't expect students to be fully engaged in the classroom because of this chronic stress. We need to use every tool available to create conditions for holistic wellness and safety.

The experience and impact of violence in my community is not isolated to any one event. Only weeks ago, a 16-year old boy from New Rochelle was fatally shot and killed by another teenager

² ABC News. "Mount Vernon High School locked down after shots fired outside of school." *ABC 7*. Feb. 7, 2022. Accessed here: <https://abc7ny.com/shooting-high-school-gun-violence-police-searching/11544877/>

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with a 9mm ghost handgun.³ This recent gun violence has shaken our community and left many wondering what will be done to stop this from happening again. The executive actions outlined by advocates represent a strong range of proactive steps necessary to respond effectively and bolster efforts by states and local governments to prevent gun violence. Gun violence is a public health crisis and we need a whole-of-government response.

As we continue the necessary work to prevent gun violence, it's absolutely critical that student voices are uplifted, which is why I recently held a youth-led town hall and a town hall on gun violence to hear directly from the community about mental health and the human toll of gun violence. Students expressed the fear they feel in their schools and communities, and they also demonstrated a clear-eyed desire for a comprehensive action plan to drive resources and support to our schools and our communities. I believe that with your executive authority, you can push forward what our youth and our communities are calling for.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to working with you on this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D
Member of Congress

³ CBS News. "Near-Fatal Stabbing, Shooting Death of 16-Year-Old Over Last 5 Days Rock New Rochelle." *CBS News*. Jan. 26, 2022. Accessed here: <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/new-rochelle-youth-violence-stabbing-16-year-old-shot-to-death/>