



April 11, 2013

The Honorable Harry Reid
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Reid,

The National Physicians Alliance, an organization of over 15,000 physicians committed to advancing the core values of service, integrity, and advocacy of the medical profession, asks for your vote on the omnibus gun violence prevention bill (S.649 / H.R. 137), including its comprehensive background check requirement. We also ask you to vote for the ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines (S.150 / H.R. 437)], measures that have the support of the majority of Americans and that could help to prevent mass killings similar to the Newtown shootings. When gun violence strikes, we are there to pick up the pieces—we see victims die painful deaths in emergency rooms or suffer for years due to gunshot injuries. Congress now has a chance to help alleviate this problem while protecting the Second Amendment, by passing these commonsense reform bills. These bills strike the right balance, which is to keep guns out the hands of people who are known to be at high risk due to prior felonies or a history of serious mental illness and to eliminate weapons and ammunition types that have no legitimate civilian use. I urge you to support these important pieces of legislation.

Even before the Newtown tragedy, the numbers alone revealed a grim story. According to a 2012 report from the Children's Defense Fund, the number of 5,740 preschoolers killed by guns in 2008 and in 2009 would have filled 229 public school classrooms of 25 students each.

We know how to stop dangerous people from getting armed—we've already built a system that works. Federal law bars felons, the severely mentally ill, and other dangerous people from buying guns, and it requires licensed gun dealers to run background checks on buyers to ensure they are not prohibited by law. Background checks have stopped over 2 million purchases since 1998.

And yet this very successful system can't possibly stop all criminals, because it doesn't apply to all sales. Nearly 80 percent of inmates who committed gun crimes simply obtained their guns in so-called "private" transfers. Federal law doesn't require any sellers other than licensed dealers to run background checks, meaning that prohibited people can buy guns easily with no questions asked—online, at gun shows, or in parking lots. The new bill closes this private sale loophole, and creates a background check requirement that is enforceable.

The number of firearm homicides in America has declined in recent years, leading to claims that our gun violence problem is getting better on its own. But in truth, the problem is worse than ever: The number of people treated for gunshot wounds increased by nearly half between 2001 and 2011. Why the discrepancy between wounds and fatalities? The good news is that emergency and trauma services have dramatically improved, meaning that more lives are saved. But the bad news is that more people are living with disabilities and chronic pain, and more healthcare dollars are being spent to manage long-term conditions.

We also ask you to support the ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, weapons of war that have no place on our streets. As physicians, we are alarmed at the threat to public safety that these types of weapons pose since they are essentially weapons designed to kill as many as possible within the shortest seconds of time. These types of guns and high capacity magazines are the weapons of choice for mass shootings and the proliferation of such weapons leads to instances where our local police forces in some cities are outgunned by criminals who possess them.

The American public understands that bad laws are fueling our gun violence problem, and they are demanding change in unison: An overwhelming majority of 92 percent of Americans support expanding the background check system to cover all sales and transfers.

The National Physicians Alliance urges you to act quickly by voting for enforceable background checks and a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Bettigole, MD, MPH
President
National Physicians Alliance

United across medical specialties, the National Physicians Alliance was founded in 2005 to restore physicians' primary emphasis on the core values of the profession: service, integrity, and advocacy. The NPA works to improve health and well-being, and to ensure equitable, affordable, high quality health care for all people. The NPA strictly refuses financial entanglements with the pharmaceutical and biomedical industries. **To learn more, visit www.npalliance.org**