SCHOOL SAFETY

INTRODUCTION

The continued gun violence in our schools has refocused Americans on the critical question of how best to protect our children. Parents send their children to school each day, trusting they will return home safely. Yet, recent events demonstrate the need for more attention and resources dedicated to improving school safety, with a thoughtful and sustained approach.

Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) believes all children have the right to live and learn in a safe and nurturing environment. Research shows that learning is enhanced when children feel safe and have their physical and emotional needs met in a healthy school environment. This includes access to nutritious food, opportunities for physical activity, clean air, and preventive health services, including mental health care. These are issues that we must face as a community and work together to solve. Schools play a critical role in helping students feel safe and supported, and in providing more intensive services and supports as needed.

A comprehensive approach is necessary to prevent future school violence. School districts cannot solve this problem independently. Congress must act by directing resources to states and districts for school safety enhancement and School-Based Threat Assessments, and by continuing to pass common sense gun safety legislation.

While schools remain among the safest places for children, with a significant decline in non-gun-related violence over the past 30 years, the threat of gun violence persists. Since 2018, there have been 119 shootings in American schools that resulted in the death and injury of children and staff. Each day, 12 children die from gun violence in America, and another 32 are shot and injured. Guns are now the leading cause of death among American children and teens. A comprehensive solution to prevent the killing of innocent youth cannot be the sole responsibility of the school community.

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

PSESD asks Congress to take the following steps to enhance school safety:

- **Ensure funding for Title IV of Every Student Succeeds Act.** Title IV represents a critical, sustained federal investment in successful prevention and intervention efforts
- **Ensure funding for School-Based Threat Assessment** and Emergency Management for Schools
- **Ensure funding for the STOP School Violence Act Grants**
- **Ensure funding for mental health counselors and services in schools.** Access to these services is a crucial component of any effort to prevent and respond to school emergencies
- **Support standalone funding for higher education institutions to partner with LEAs to build up the school mental health personnel pipeline** and to place these critical support staff in the most vulnerable school communities.
- **Ensure continued federal funding for research to identify the root causes of gun violence** and its prevention in schools
- **Ensure and support increased funding to address bullying, harassment and student violence**

PSESD implores Congress to pass more gun safety legislation that will:

- **Increase enforcement of existing gun laws**
- **Reinstate the ban on the sale, import, transfer, and ownership of assault weapons**
- **Ban large-capacity magazines**
- **Require thorough background checks for all gun purchasers, ending the “gun-show” loophole**
- **Prevent individuals convicted of violent crimes from purchasing guns**
- **Prevent individuals with mental health issues from purchasing or owning a gun** (18 U.S.C. 922 (g))
- **Provide severe consequences to irresponsible gun owners**

We cannot turn our schools into armed fortresses. The decision to bring police officers into schools should be made on a school-by-school basis. We oppose efforts to increase the presence of guns in our schools by arming teachers and administrators. Eliminating easy access to weapons and increasing opportunities for mental health care are essential steps toward mitigating the horrific reality of recurring murders of educators and children.

If we hope to prevent future tragedies at schools, we must comprehensively address both school safety and gun safety. Increased mental health services, community supports for youth, and new attitudes about violence in our entertainment must all be part of this approach. Sustainable changes require the investment of both time and resources. Federal funding is critical to ensuring schools remain the safest place for children. Now is the time to act.

It is also important to address the more common safety concerns our students and schools face, such as bullying, harassment (including cyberbullying), and sexual harassment. We are experiencing increases in student violence, often influenced by social media, inadequate emergency plans, and insufficient safety and security measures. Too often, the focus is on reaction rather than prevention.

Disadvantaged students, including those with disabilities, often report feeling unsafe at higher rates than their peers. Many also feel they receive less support or advocacy from school staff, often due to biases related to their appearance or other personal characteristics. These students frequently believe that schools do not fully understand, acknowledge, or address their concerns about safety and violence.

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