

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 30, 2023

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
HHS, Secretary
200 Independence Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Vivek Murthy
HHS, Surgeon General
200 Independence Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra and Surgeon General Murthy:

Since the start of 2023, there have been over 290 mass shootings in the United States – nearly two each day of this year. We acknowledge and appreciate the Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) commitment to keep our communities safe, but more must be done to effectively curb gun violence. We urge HHS to publish a Surgeon General report to uplift the urgency of addressing gun violence as a threat to our nation’s public health.

A Surgeon General report would help fill gaps in gun violence research and identify areas where data remains limited. It would also demonstrate, from a clinical perspective, that gun violence is a public health crisis that requires a whole-of-government response. A Surgeon General report would also infuse a renewed sense of urgency on the issue and coalesce researchers, policymakers, and the public.

Gun violence is currently the leading cause of premature deaths among children and teens in the U.S.¹ The U.S. represents about 4% of the world’s population, but approximately 35% of global firearm suicides, making Americans 25 times more likely to be killed by gun violence than people in other high-income countries.² We also know that gun violence disproportionately harms communities of color. Young Black Americans aged 15 to 34 experience the highest rates of gun homicides across all demographics. Alarming, while comprising approximately 12.5% of the U.S. population in 2020, Black Americans were the victims in 61% of all gun homicides.³

HHS must do more to appropriately elevate gun violence as a public health issue that necessitates a comprehensive, immediate response – which requires a strong foundation in gun violence data. While Congress has in recent years begun to provide funding for research on this issue, government-backed research on gun violence has been scarce due to the 1996 Dickey Amendment, which the CDC interpreted as restricting it from researching gun violence.

¹ Choi, A. (2023, March 29). Children and teens are more likely to die by guns than anything else. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/29/health/us-children-gun-deaths-dg/index.html>

² Statistics. Giffords. (2022, October 6). Retrieved October 19, 2022, from <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-violence-statistics/>

³ Center for American Progress analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Injury Prevention & Control: Data & Statistics (WISQARS): Fatal Injury Data,” available at <https://wisqars.cdc.gov/fatal-reports> (last accessed June 2022).

Surgeon General Report on Gun Violence

There is ample precedent for a report of this nature, such as in 1964, when the late President Kennedy requested the Surgeon General to compile a report on smoking tobacco. This Surgeon General report punctured public consciousness, elevated the issue and led to countless health and commercial reforms.

The lack of a landmark, data-based publication on firearms injuries and death severely hamstrings efforts to curb the growing threat of gun violence. A Surgeon General report specifically on gun violence would be a critical step to addressing this public health emergency and address the dearth of gun violence research.

Sincerely,



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Cori Bush
Member of Congress



Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress



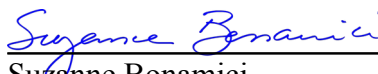
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Steven Horsford
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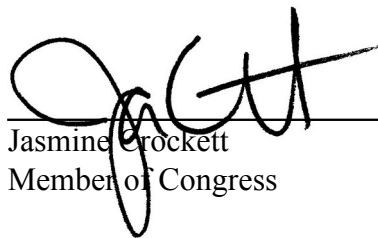
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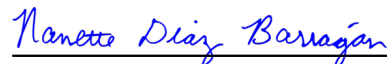
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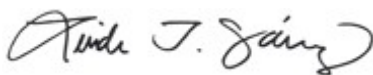
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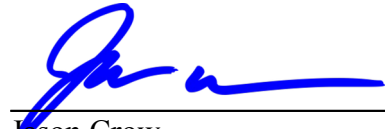
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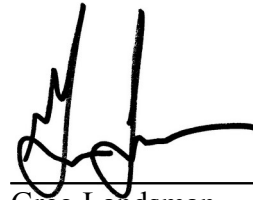
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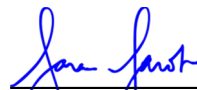
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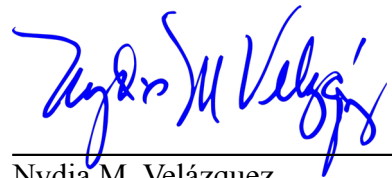
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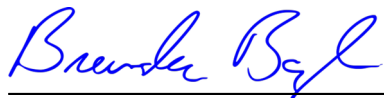
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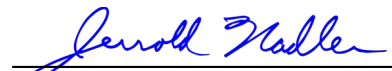
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