



June 23, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As the member organizations of the Federation of Associations of Schools of the Health Professions (FASHP), we urge you to quickly pass the *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act*, legislation that will take critical steps to curb the gun violence epidemic. Gun violence is a public health crisis which is devastating communities across the U.S.

FASHP was created in 1968 as a forum for representatives of health professions education institutions to address education's role in organizational patterns of health care; to encourage effective collaboration among the professions in education and practice; to prepare health professions education for the future; and to serve as a liaison with other organizations sharing an interest in health professions education. FASHP comprises 18 associations representing a health professions education community that includes 7,429 programs, institutions, hospitals, and health systems, and more than 1.3 million students, faculty, clinicians, administrators, residents, and researchers.

Health professionals and health professional students dedicate their careers to ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of individuals, including health care workers. Gun violence is a public health crisis which is devastating communities across the U.S. We have sadly witnessed this in recent weeks, with mass shootings in Uvalde, Texas and Buffalo, New York, as well as a shooting in a health care setting, among several others across the country. Unfortunately, these disturbing events are not a new phenomenon, and the human toll of gun violence is well documented:

- In 2020, 45,222 people died in the U.S. from gun violence with about 54% of those deaths being suicides.¹
- Gun violence has become the leading cause of death among children and teens.²
- Gun violence is estimated to cost the U.S. \$280 billion annually.³

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/03/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>

² <https://www.everydayhealth.com/public-health/gun-violence-in-america-is-a-public-health-crisis/>

³ <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that more than 100 people die from firearm-related injuries each day. In fact, firearm-related injuries were in the top 5 leading causes of death for people ages 1-44 in the U.S. More than 70 percent of those who survive report the cause of their injuries due to firearm-related assaults. People who survive these assaults experience long-term consequences including chronic mental health problems, physical disabilities, reduced sense of safety, and more.⁴

Furthermore, trauma and fear caused by mass shootings has had a significant impact on the mental health of Americans in communities throughout the nation. A large majority of U.S. adults report experiencing stress associated with mass shootings, and a third say that fear of mass shootings stops them from going to certain places and events.⁵ Data also show that survivors and members of affected communities experience increases in anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, and other signs of psychological concerns.

These findings further underscore the need for urgent action to prevent gun violence. Additionally, we welcome the bill's investments in programs to address the mental health impact of gun violence on children, families, and communities. At the same time, we emphasize that conflating mental illness to mass shootings is dangerous, harmful, discriminatory, and stigmatizing. Individuals living with mental illness account for a very small portion of gun violence, and in fact, most are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators of it. ^[6]^[7]

We urge Congress to pass the *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act*. We cannot afford to lose more lives to the preventable consequences of gun violence. FASHP looks forward to collaborating with you on this urgent matter. We also invite you to utilize FASHP as a resource if you have any questions about health professions education and training. Furthermore, if you are interested in connecting with health professions schools or programs in your state or district, FASHP members are available to assist you at any time. For additional information, please contact Beeta Rasouli at brasouli@aspsh.org.

Thank you for your work on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Federation of Associations of Schools of the Health Professions (FASHP)

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Association of University Programs in Health Administration
Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
Association of American Medical Colleges
American Physical Therapy Association
American Psychological Association
American Dental Education Association
American Association of Colleges of Nursing

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/firearms/fastfact.html>

⁵ American Psychological Association (APA) (2019). One-Third of US Adults Say Fear of Mass Shootings Prevents Them from Going to Certain Places or Events. Retrieved from: <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2019/08/fear-mass-shooting>

⁶ Baumann ML, Teasdale B. Severe mental illness and firearm access: Is violence really the danger? *Int J Law Psychiatry*. 2018 Jan-Feb;56:44-49. doi: 10.1016/j.ijlp.2017.11.003. Epub 2017 Dec 7. PMID: 29701598.

⁷ Brekke JS, Prindle C, Bae SW, Long JD. Risks for individuals with schizophrenia who are living in the community. *Psychiatr Serv*. 2001 Oct;52(10):1358-66. doi: 10.1176/appi.ps.52.10.1358. PMID: 11585953.

Physician Assistant Education Association
Council on Social Work Education
American Council of Academic Physical Therapy
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
Association of Schools Advancing Health Professions
American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine
Association of Chiropractic Colleges