

To: Senator

From:

Dear Senator

I wish to express my concerns regarding gun violence and my perception of legislative inaction and paralysis on moving meaningful legislation into the forefront of public discussion. I am aware that gun violence is considered by many a public health epidemic and yet scientific research into root causes and potential solutions into gun violence have been historically hindered by the Dickey Amendment. Little science-based research has been conducted since this legislation was passed in 1997. I am encouraging, a) establish adequate funding to the CDC and NIH to engage in research that can produce reasoned evidence-based solutions and b) repeal the Dickey Amendment (ref. attached policy brief).

Sincerely,

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Gun Violence as a Public Healthcare Epidemic a Policy Brief

Executive summary.

Gun violence continues to emerge as a public healthcare epidemic and in many respects a policy crisis. The Dickey Amendment constrained the ability of health institutions such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and National Institute of Health (NIH), through inadequate funding, to conduct meaningful research into the cause and potential solutions to gun violence. Over the last two decades half-million individuals have lost their life and another 1.5 million are survivors. There is public outcry and an impassioned and emotional response to these shootings, especially mass killings without a well-reasoned response. To understand the cause and complexity requires adequate research utilizing scientific methodology to establish evidence-based interventions and solutions. Through adequate funding for science-based research reasoned and evidence-based solutions can be explored.

Rajan,S. and Allegrante, J.P. (2018). Funding for gun violence research is key to the health and safety of the nation. *Journal of Public Health, 108* (2). doi: 10.2015/AJPH.2017.304235

Introduction & Problem statement

Gun violence, by any rational definition, is a healthcare epidemic having claimed more than 500,000 lives in the US over the past two decades and nearly 1.5 million others survived gunshot wounds. Absent from the debate on gun violence is an unbiased scientific root-cause analysis supported by comprehensive data collection. This has severely limited the ability to propose and test potential solutions and implement effective action. The health of the US population is one of the primary charges of the CDC. Through active engagement the CDC responds to national health problems i.e. disease, natural disasters, and violence that threaten the safety and welfare of Americans. The lack of federal funding has resulted in the failure to approach gun violence from an evidence-based implementation of solutions and interventions backed by sound scientific research.

This lack of funding dates to 1996 with the Congressional passage of the Dickey Amendment as a direct response to emerging research on gun violence at the time. This effectively constrained the CDC from conducting research, in fear it might result in gun control. The research being conducted at the time was rooted in scientific analysis exemplary of sound public health science seeking to describe and document causes, investigate mechanisms, and test prevention measures. The scientific methodology employed had already impacted some of our nation's most problematic health issues such as motor vehicle accidents, tobacco consumption, and infectious diseases.

Approaches and results

What should unbiased, systematic public health scientific methodology and research look like. Early epidemiological research design and analysis into gun violence was predicated on rigorous scientifically sound methodology with proven validity in the study of other diseases. Additionally, the data analysis from these studies produced conclusions that remain scientifically defensible. The process of conducting analysis, compiling data, drawing conclusions, submitting peer-reviewed articles provides a roadmap for conducting supporting research validating the validity and reproducibility of results and conclusions. The application of

evidence-based solutions provides a reasoned proactive approach to attenuating gun violence. This reasoned approach demystifies a purely emotionally charged response from opposing views demanding gun control versus rights.

Conclusions

Inadequate funding remains the single largest impediment in providing evidence-based solutions to gun violence. Society's ability to avert gun violence and its public health impact relies on the ability of institutions such as the CDC and NIH to conduct research. Without establishing the determinants of gun violence effective solutions will remain elusive. As a public health problem there needs to be an investment in dedicating intellectual talent to study and propose solutions to curb gun violence. To understand the causes and complexities of day-to-day shootings to mass killings there must be a willingness to fund the needed research. This is just the bare minimum needed to begin prevention efforts that are effective on multiple levels.

Implications and recommendations

The current legislative environment has produced emotional and impassioned responses each time a shooting happens; and yet has impeded investigation into root causes of gun violence through underfunding of research. Gun violence is a growing crisis warranting public and political attention. Even the originator of the Dickey Amendment, now admits that it was an ill-conceived piece of legislation recognizing the potential of research that could have saved many lives. A renewed commitment to fund research could provide validation of effectiveness for existing solutions; while establishing new evidence-based solutions.