

TEMPLE  
ISAIAH



Rabbi Zoë Klein – Rabbi Dara Frimmer – Rabbi Joel Nickerson – Cantor Tifani Coyot

July 29, 2013

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leaders Reid and McConnell:

On behalf of Temple Isaiah, one of West Los Angeles' largest Reform synagogues, we write today to encourage you, the Obama Administration and Congress to act quickly to prevent further needless firearms deaths and injuries. In recent years, we have witnessed a profoundly distressing series of mass killings in schools, shopping malls, theaters, houses of worship and elsewhere, including the atrocity committed in Newtown, Connecticut. These violent and horrific acts shock our conscience and country. The epidemic of gun violence in America far exceeds other western nations. The Jewish community itself, and we here in Los Angeles, have experienced this violence at community centers, Jewish federations and elsewhere. It must stop!

Jewish tradition inspires our concern with issues of quality of life and public safety and compels us to uphold the sanctity of life and the commandment against murder. Over the years, the organized Jewish community has supported a wide range of legislative efforts designed to respect the Constitution's Second Amendment, ensure firearm safety, and prevent the proliferation of dangerous weapons. Such measures include the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act and the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, commonly referred to as the Assault Weapons Ban. While opinion polls indicate broad support for governmental restrictions on the availability of firearms, state legislatures and the U.S. Congress have all too often been hesitant to enact much needed gun legislation, with disastrous repercussions.

In just the past two years, we have witnessed horrific tragedies, among them the shooting of 19 people, including Representative Gabrielle Giffords, in Tucson, Arizona, the massacre in an Aurora, Colorado movie theater, and the slaying of children and educators in a Newtown elementary school. In 2011 alone, the FBI reported that 8,583 individuals were murdered by firearms in the United States. It is estimated that an average elementary school age child will witness over 8,000 murders and as many as 100,000 other acts of violence in the media before sixth grade. And far too many Americans lack access to mental health services that would reduce their isolation and improve their lives while decreasing the likelihood that they will turn to violence with guns. We must use the wrenching hurt and sorrow from these tragedies productively and confront our national policy challenges.

Temple Isaiah, its congregation of over 1,000 families and Jewish organizations throughout the United States are committed to directly confronting gun violence in our communities and across the United States. We recognize the Second Amendment right of Americans to own guns, but we do not accept the current state of affairs. We also recognize the need to increase security at certain places of public and private gathering, but we refuse to accept a dystopian formulation where schools, houses of worship, community centers, shopping malls, theaters, and other venues are locked-down and fortified, or where more guns is the preferred solution for public safety.

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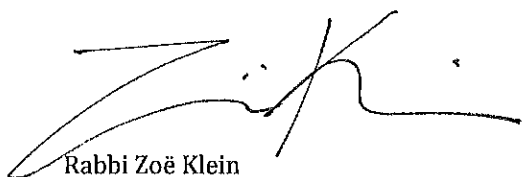
Comprehensive action is needed to restore the safety of our schools, communities and public spaces and we urge you and your colleagues to support a strong and comprehensive approach to prevent gun violence. No single solution will prevent all future tragedies. Nevertheless, we encourage reasonable efforts to save lives, which could include:

- Meaningful legislation to limit access to the most dangerous weapons and high capacity ammunition magazines, both of which have no other purpose than to inflict maximum carnage
- Tracking for all firearms at the time of sale or subsequent transfer; and periodic licensing of anyone that purchases, owns, carries, and or uses firearms
- Appropriate waiting periods, volume sales restrictions, and background checks, including criminal and mental health histories, for all firearm sales, including private sales and gun show sales
- Legislation and regulations requiring the safe storage of firearms
- Government firearm buy-back programs
- Diligent enforcement of firearm regulations
- Robust efforts to ensure that every person in need has access to quality mental health care
- Encouraging a serious national conversation about violence in media and video games

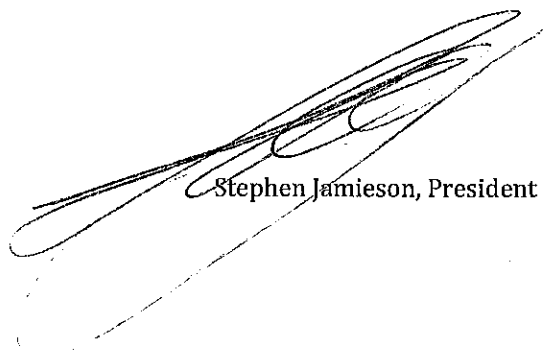
Laws and regulations alone will not stop the spate of violence. Limiting access of dangerous weapons to those who may do harm is absolutely necessary but not sufficient. We must also look at contributing factors and policies that may affect gun violence. For example, a fully funded mental health system—one with true parity between physical and mental health – is vital to ensure the wellbeing of those in need. Programs at schools and community based organizations are needed to help destigmatize mental health issues and provide vehicles for early recognition, prevention, and intervention. Remembering that 96% of violent crimes are committed by people who are not mentally ill, the discussion about mental health issues related to mass violence should be done with the utmost sensitivity and not characterize all those with mental illness as violent. Rather, we should focus on all possible causative factors to gun violence and not shy away from examining the impact of a chronically underfunded mental health system.

We thank you and your colleagues for your serious and diligent work, and urge the Senate to embrace a comprehensive set of policy solutions to address this epidemic.

Sincerely,



Rabbi Zoë Klein



Stephen Jamieson, President

cc: California Congressional Delegation