July 10, 2013

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
503 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chair, Senate Appropriations
 Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations
 Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
354 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski, Ranking Member Shelby, Chairman Harkin, and Ranking Member Moran:

As a diverse group of health professionals, public health, and child advocacy organizations, we write to applaud the Senate Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee’s inclusions of $10 million in FY 2014 to support research investments to address the public health crisis of gun violence.

We urge the full Senate Appropriations Committee to support at least $10 million within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in FY 2014 along with sufficient new funding at the National Institutes of Health to support research into the causes and prevention of gun violence. Furthermore, we urge Members to oppose any efforts to reduce, eliminate, or condition CDC funding related to gun violence prevention research.

The dearth of gun violence research has contributed to the lack of meaningful progress in reducing firearm injuries. Firearm injuries are one of the top three causes of death among youth\(^1\). The U.S. has one of the highest rates of injuries, suicides and homicides among developed countries. While the rate of gun-related deaths is down from a high of 15 per 100,000 in the mid-1990s, it has subsequently plateaued since 2000 at 10 per 100,000 and has remained steady\(^4\). Furthermore, it is estimated that the national rate of gun deaths will surpass the rate of motor vehicle accident-related deaths within the next two years\(^iii\). In several states, such as Arizona, Colorado, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Oregon, the rate of gun deaths has already met or exceeded traffic-related deaths\(^iv\). This is significant because motor vehicle accidents are one of the top two leading causes of unintentional injury deaths, which is the number one cause of death among individuals younger than 45\(^v\).

Research can contribute to fewer lives lost, reductions in injuries and changes in social norms. Federal infrastructures already exist to establish prevention and harm reduction strategies. Since the 1950s, a research-based public health approach has translated extensive research into prevention and systems change and contributed to an 80 percent reduction in motor vehicle fatalities per mile driven\(^vi\). Significant research investments could address these issues by helping provide a more accurate understanding of the problems associated with gun violence and to determine how best to reduce the high rate of firearm-related deaths and injuries. Unfortunately, in 1996 Congress eliminated funding for CDC research on gun violence and accompanied the cut with language barring any research that would “advocate or promote gun control.” The research limitations have also drastically limited the workforce of researchers dedicated to gun violence prevention. It is estimated that fewer than 20 academics in the U.S. currently focus on gun violence\(^vii\).
On June 5, the Institute of Medicine released a report outlining a research agenda for addressing firearm-related injuries and deaths as a public health issue. The report highlights five key areas for research on this topic: characteristics of firearm violence; risk and protective factors; firearm violence prevention and other interventions; the impact of gun safety technology; and video games and other media. The IOM’s report notes that this agenda would be essential in supporting the development of policies to reduce the public health impact of firearms in the same manner as approaches that have found success in other areas, such as motor vehicle safety.

Funding at both CDC and NIH would be an important step toward realizing a robust research agenda and developing public health interventions that could protect children and keep them safe from gun violence. We urge the Senate Appropriations Committee to provide $10 million in new funding in FY 2014 to support the president’s recommendation for CDC research on the causes and prevention of gun violence, along with sufficient new funding at the National Institutes of Health to further advance this critical research. We also urge Members to oppose any efforts to reduce, eliminate, or condition CDC funding related to gun violence prevention research.

As Congress moves forward with the FY 2014 appropriations process, we welcome the opportunity to work with you on ways to reduce injuries and keep communities safe. For more information, please contact Sonya Clay at 202-347-8600.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Preventive Medicine
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Medical Association
American Pediatric Society
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Public Health Association
American Trauma Society
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and its Million Mom March and Brady Chapters
Center to Prevent Youth Violence
Children’s Defense Fund
Futures Without Violence
Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence
National Child Abuse Coalition
National Violence Prevention Network
Prevention Institute
Safe States Alliance
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine
Society for Pediatric Research
Trust For America’s Health
Voices for America’s Children


