

# CONGRESSWOMAN CAROLYN B. MALONEY

## Opening Statement Gun Violence in America *Understanding and Reducing the Costs of Firearm Injuries and Deaths*

September 18, 2019

Thank you all for being here today.

And I'd especially like to thank our witnesses, some of whom have lost family members to gun violence. And as we talk about the costs of gun violence, let us never forget that the biggest, most tragic cost is the loss of human life.

I believe that Congress must act to help stem the gun violence epidemic in our country.

In 2017 alone, almost 40,000 people were killed by guns in this country. Firearms are now the leading cause of death in young adults. Our gun homicide rate for teens and young adults is nearly 50 times higher than other high-income countries. And ninety percent of all the women killed by firearms in high-income countries are killed in the United States.

In August alone, more than 50 lives were taken in a series of horrible massacres. So far this year, there have been 301 mass shootings – that's more than one per day.

And yet – unbelievably – some people say that the real problem here is that we don't have enough guns.

They say that the only thing that will make America safer is *more* guns. But the fact is that if more guns made us safer we already would be the safest country in the world.

In the United States, there are more guns in civilian hands than any other country in the world. An American is nearly seven times more likely than someone in Canada to die by a gun, eight times more likely than someone in France, almost twenty times more likely than a person in Germany and almost forty times more likely than someone in the UK, Australia or New Zealand, and nearly two hundred times more than someone in Japan.

More people in the United States died from firearm-related injuries from 2003 to 2012 than the entire number of combat fatalities in World War II.

There is no way to estimate “cost of a human” life. The loss is incalculable.

But there is also economic cost – a lost breadwinner's income, astronomical medical costs, costs to employers, schools, police, hospitals and the criminal justice system.

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In order to help people better understand those costs, I've asked my staff to produce a report that compiles data on the economic costs of gun violence in all 50 states.

The report finds that:

- Rural states have the highest costs of gun violence measured as a share of their economies.
- States with high rates of gun ownership have the highest rates of gun suicide.
- The three largest states suffer the largest absolute costs.
- High youth death rates from gun violence extend across region.

In contrast, my state of New York, which has stricter gun laws including an assault weapons ban, has one of the three lowest costs of gun violence as a share of its economy, along with Hawaii and Massachusetts.

There are three people in this room today - who have suffered heart wrenching losses as a result of gun violence.

One of our witnesses, Tina Meins, lost her father in the mass shooting in San Bernardino, California in 2015. Dr. Suzanna Hupp, who also is testifying, lost both her parents in a mass shooting at a restaurant in Texas in 1991. And Sheneé Johnson, seated in the first row, lost both a fiancée and her son to gun violence.

We must fight to lower the risk that other families are forced to bear such suffering.

Other countries have drastically reduced gun violence – because they found the courage to act.

In Australia, in 1996, after a man with an assault rifle killed 35 people - the parliament responded by banning automatic and semiautomatic weapons and created a buyback program that resulted in 650,000 weapons being turned in. That's political courage.

In New Zealand, in 2019, after 51 people were killed at the Christchurch mosque - the parliament acted, voting nearly unanimously to outlaw automatic and semiautomatic weapons. That's guts... the kind that the U.S. Congress has lacked for many years.

In fact, in 1996, Congress made things worse.

It passed legislation that effectively blocked all federal funding for gun violence research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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That is why we have gone more than 20 years without substantially deepening our knowledge about gun violence prevention and about what we can do to end this epidemic.

This year the Democratic House acted to address this crisis.

We passed the first gun safety reforms in 25 years.

The bill requires universal background checks, closes the gun show loophole, and gives the FBI more time to conduct life-saving background checks.

This summer, the House passed another bill, one that I have spent years fighting for, to invest \$50 million to conduct research on how to reduce gun violence.

And last week, the House Judiciary Committee sent to the full House a ban on high capacity magazines, “red flag” legislation, and a bill to prohibit those who commit misdemeanor hate crimes from obtaining a gun.

These are common sense measures that the vast majority of Americans strongly support.

It’s time for change.

I look forward to a day when our children don’t have to be afraid to go to school. When our teachers don’t learn how to treat gunshot wounds. When nearly half of Americans aren’t worried about being a victim in a mass shooting. And when those who hold the reins of power move beyond hollow offers of “thoughts and prayers.”

Let us honor the victims of gun violence and their families by working to prevent more victims. Let us – like other countries in the developed world – turn tragedy into bold action.

And may all Members of Congress, especially those in the Senate, find the courage to act.

I look forward to our witnesses’ testimony this afternoon.