



DATE

Dear **Representative/Senator** _____,

As a future pediatrician and member of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Section on Medical Students, Residents, and Fellowship Trainees (SOMSRFT), I urge your immediate leadership to protect the health and safety of the nation's children from needless and pervasive firearm violence.

Gun violence is a public health threat to children. In fact, firearm injuries are one of the top three causes of death among youth, causing twice as many deaths as cancer, five times as many as heart disease and 15 times as many as infections.

My priorities as your constituent and future pediatrician are to keep children safe by finding a new way forward on common-sense gun violence prevention legislation, supporting a robust gun violence prevention research agenda, and ensuring improved access to mental health services for children.

Research shows that strong gun policies are effective at reducing injuries, suicides and homicides by keeping guns out of the hands of those most at risk for harming themselves and others. In 2010 alone, firearms contributed to 11,569 injuries, 1,249 homicides and 720 suicides in children under age 18.

- **Please find a way forward on gun safety legislation**, including: reinstating an assault weapons ban, improving background checks, strengthening anti-trafficking laws and promoting safe firearm storage.

Federal research funding is essential to understand the causes of gun violence and the most effective prevention and intervention strategies.

- **Please renew efforts to apply science to gun safety and prioritize evidence-based research to reduce firearm injuries and deaths.** This includes full funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institutes of Health and Department of Justice to conduct evidence-based firearm research without political interference.

The Newtown, Connecticut tragedy was an unfortunate reminder that exposure to gun violence harms children's health and development, highlighting a need for children to have access to mental health services. Our current health care system does not meet the needs of these children. Although 1 in 5 children in the United States suffers from a diagnosable mental health disorder, only 21% of affected children actually receive needed treatment. Mental illness is like any other disease; the earlier it is identified and treated, the better the health outcomes.

- **Please renew efforts to pass the Mental Health Awareness and Improvement Act**, which reauthorizes and improves programs related to awareness, prevention and early identification of mental health conditions and promotes linkages to appropriate services for children and youth. Please also support the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program to address the shortage of mental health providers like developmental pediatricians, pediatric neurologists, and child and adolescent psychiatrists.

As a constituent, future pediatrician and child health advocate, I stand ready to work with you to prevent the unnecessary firearm violence which continues to plague too many children and families in this nation. Together, we can P.A.V.E. the way to firearm injury prevention.

Sincerely,

NAME, CONTACT INFORMATION