

# ARMING TEACHERS IS A DANGEROUS PROPOSAL

Schools are meant to be places of sanctuary, safety, and learning for children. But, as the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, shows, children are also victims of America's gun violence crisis, even while attending school.

After shootings like Parkland, and as a way to further their "guns everywhere" agenda, the NRA takes every opportunity to push for policies that would arm teachers. There is no evidence that arming teachers will protect children in schools. To the contrary, research indicates that arming teachers will make children less safe.

This is why school safety experts—including teachers, school resource officers, and law enforcement organizations—oppose the policy. If lawmakers want to prevent school shootings, they must adopt proactive, commonsense solutions to prevent people with dangerous histories from obtaining guns in the first place.

## **Arming teachers ignores research that shows the presence of a gun increases the risks posed to children.**

- As with their parents' firearms, students may be aware of where and how teachers keep their firearms, and how to obtain access. A recent study shows that the majority of children are aware of where their parents store their guns, and more than one third reported handling their parents' guns—40 percent of them doing so without the knowledge of their parents.<sup>1</sup>
- Access to a firearm, irrespective of age, triples the risk of death by suicide and doubles the risk of death by homicide.<sup>2</sup> And the vast majority of fatal unintentional shootings of children are self-inflicted, or are by other children and involve an unsecured gun found in their own home.<sup>3</sup>
- Easy availability of firearms play a fatal role in child firearm suicides—in over 80 percent of youth gun suicides, the child used a gun belonging to a family member.<sup>4</sup>
- This body of research showing the increased risks to children posed by the presence of a gun suggests that introducing guns in schools would have similar tragic consequences.

## **America's teachers, school safety experts, and law enforcement oppose arming teachers.**

- The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, the nation's two largest organizations of education professionals, oppose allowing guns in schools, a position they reiterated after the Parkland shooting.<sup>5</sup> The Presidents of the AFT and NEA have consistently rejected calls to arm teachers:

**"GUNS HAVE NO PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS. PERIOD.** We must do everything we can to reduce the possibility of any gunfire in schools, and concentrate on ways to keep all guns off school property and ensure the safety of children and school employees. Lawmakers at every level of government should dismiss this dangerous idea and instead focus on measures that will create the safe and supportive learning environments our children deserve."<sup>6</sup>

- A national guide published by the federal government's chief legal, law enforcement, public health, education, and emergency management agencies cautioned that *allowing civilians to carry guns in schools is not a sound security practice.*<sup>7</sup>

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**THE FBI FOUND THAT IN 160 ACTIVE SHOOTER INCIDENTS, THERE WAS ONLY ONE SUCCESSFUL ARMED CIVILIAN INTERVENTION—AND THE CIVILIAN IN THAT INCIDENT WAS A HIGHLY TRAINED U.S. MARINE.**

- The National Association of School Resource Officers strongly opposes the proposal to arm teachers due to the risk it would pose to law enforcement, students, and the school community, as well as the risks to the armed teachers themselves.<sup>8</sup>
- The President and Executive Director of the Major Cities Chiefs Association, which represents 75 police forces from large cities in the USA and Canada, both agree that arming teachers is “*not a good idea*”<sup>9</sup> and say, “*The more guns that are coming into the equation, the more volatility and the more risk there is of somebody getting hurt.*”<sup>10</sup>

**The NRA claims arming teachers will stop “active shooters” during a school shooting. But arming civilians is not an effective way to stop active shooters.**

- The FBI found that in 160 active shooter incidents, there was only one successful armed civilian intervention—and the civilian in that incident was a highly trained U.S. Marine. In contrast, *unarmed* civilians successfully intervened in over 20 incidents.<sup>11</sup>
- Research casts significant doubt on the idea that civilians can shoot as well as trained police officers in active shooter situations.<sup>12</sup>

**In fact, armed civilians have put law enforcement in danger, delayed law enforcement responses, and posed a risk to innocent bystanders during active shooter crises.**

- Following the shooting of 12 police officers at a demonstration where dozens of open carry activists were present, then-Dallas police chief David Brown said, “*We don’t know who the good guy is versus the bad guy when everyone starts shooting.*”<sup>13</sup>
- When a man shot and killed three people at a Walmart in Thornton, Colorado, law enforcement noted that shoppers drawing weapons in self-defense “absolutely” slowed the process of identifying the suspect.<sup>14</sup>
- When Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was shot and injured in Tucson, Arizona, an armed civilian came very close to firing at the unarmed civilian who disarmed the shooter.<sup>15</sup>

**Arming teachers would burden schools with large new costs for insurance and security.**

- Schools that have allowed employees to carry guns have had difficulty obtaining insurance coverage. Some liability insurance providers have declined coverage to these schools while others have increased annual premiums, stretching already tight budgets.<sup>16</sup>
- Proposals to arm teachers will likely result in additional costs for training teachers, firearms, ammunition, and other costs, putting an additional financial burden on school districts and, ultimately, on taxpayers.<sup>17</sup>

**The best way to protect American children and schools from shootings such as the incident in Parkland, Florida, is to pass comprehensive gun safety laws that can prevent people with dangerous histories from ever getting a gun, some examples of which include:**

- **Background checks on all gun sales:** The foundation of any comprehensive gun violence prevention strategy must be background checks for all gun sales. Under current federal law, criminal background checks are only required for sales conducted by licensed dealers. This loophole is easy to exploit, and makes it easy for convicted felons or domestic abusers to acquire guns without a background check simply by finding an unlicensed seller online or at a gun show. When Connecticut passed a law requiring background checks for all handgun sales, the state saw a 40 percent reduction in gun homicides and a 15 percent reduction in gun suicides.<sup>18</sup> 97 percent of voters support legislation to require criminal background checks on every gun sale.<sup>19</sup>

- **Red Flag Laws:** This policy, increasingly being adopted by states, empowers family members and law enforcement to petition a judge to temporarily block a person from having guns if they pose a danger to themselves or others. If Florida had a red flag law, the shooter's mother or police could have asked a judge to order a temporary removal of his guns. Red flag laws—also known as Extreme Risk Protective Orders (ERPO)—can help prevent suicide too. That is meaningful because suicide makes up nearly two-thirds of gun deaths in this country.<sup>20</sup> Since Connecticut passed a red flag law, researchers estimate that it has already saved more than 70 lives from suicide.<sup>21</sup> Red flag bills have been introduced or carried over in 25 states and D.C. this year.<sup>22</sup>
- **Keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers:** The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation makes it five times more likely that a woman will be killed.<sup>23</sup> And most mass shootings are connected to domestic and family violence.<sup>24</sup> Mass shootings significantly impact children: over 40 percent of fatalities in domestic or family violence related mass shootings were children.<sup>25</sup> When abusers are convicted of domestic violence or subject to final restraining orders, they should be blocked from purchasing guns, and required to turn in those they already own. We also need to close the “boyfriend loophole”—by making sure those laws apply to abusers regardless of whether the violence is directed towards a spouse or a dating partner.
- **Raise the minimum age to 21 years old for the purchase of semi-automatic rifles and shotguns—so that it matches the minimum purchase age for handguns:** Because he was under the age of 21, the Parkland shooter could not have gone into a gun store and bought a handgun, but he legally bought an AR-15. Eighteen to 20-year-olds commit gun homicides at a rate nearly four times higher than adults 21 and older.<sup>26</sup>

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