

Statement for the Congressional Record

Rep. Louise M. Slaughter- Reducing Gun Violence

December 17, 2012

M./ Speaker,

I rise today to mourn those who were killed in Newtown, Connecticut last Friday, and begin the urgent work of stopping tragedies like this from ever happening again.

Let us be clear- there can be no better tribute to the innocent children and educators who were killed in Newtown than to finally address the out-of-control gun violence that kills tens of thousands of Americans every year.

In answering the call, Congress must look to enact a comprehensive and commonsense reform to our nation's gun laws, and renew our commitment to a mental health system that has been neglected for far too long.

We can begin by taking the most dangerous and deadly weapons off our streets. That means we must do more than simply reinstate the Assault Weapons Ban of 1994. We must strengthen that law by including language that retroactively applies to weapons already in in possession, so that law enforcement can finally remove all assault weapons from our communities.

These weapons serve no purpose other than to kill human beings. Our colleague, Senator Joe Manchin, today said the following: "I just came with my family from deer hunting. I've never had more than three shells in a clip. Sometimes you don't get more than one shot anyway. It's time to get beyond rhetoric, it's time to sit down and move in a responsible way." He continued to say

that limiting the size of a gun magazine to even 10 bullets should be on the table when it comes to reforming our laws and ending gun violence.” I couldn’t agree more, and believe that no weapon that is designed with the primary intent to kill people should be out on our streets.

This also means that this Congress must look at the types of bullets that are sold today. The perpetrator who murdered more than 20 innocent children took their lives with bullets that were designed to break up inside a victims body and inflict the maximum amount of damage to internal organs, bones and tissue. There is no legal activity in our country that requires the use of such deadly bullets. They should be included under any renewal of an Assault Weapons Ban.

In addition to removing the most deadly weapons from our streets, we must also close the so-called “fire sale loophole” and “gun show loophole”- two products of a powerful gun lobby that must be brought to heel. Because of these loopholes, more than 40 percent of all guns sold in the United States are sold without the buyer undergoing a federal background check.

We require anyone who wishes to drive a car to prove that they can safely operate a vehicle, yet when it comes to buying a gun, almost half all buyers do not have to prove they will safely operate such deadly weapons. In a country of 315 million people, there are almost 280 million guns owned. Of those 280 million guns, almost 112 million of them will have been purchased without a background check. Were they purchased by law-abiding citizens or by troubled individuals who may endanger lives? Because of irresponsible legal loopholes, we simply do not know.

No more. It is time that we require anyone in the United States wishing to purchase a gun to pass a federal background check. I am a co-sponsor of H.R. 263, the “Fire Sale Loophole Closing Act” and H.R. 1781, the “Fix Gun Checks Act”, and urge the Leadership of this Congress to bring both bills to the floor for a vote.

Finally, our work is not complete unless we improve our nation’s mental health system. For years, experts have known how to improve our mental health care system, but a lack of political will has led to its continual decay.

Such failure has a very real impact on the health and well being of thousands of our fellow

citizens everyday. Instead of accessing the care they need, they are often left on their own to deal with illnesses that they have little power to control. Place these troubled individuals in the vicinity of a deadly weapon, instead of the care of a mental health care provider, and tragedy can result.

If we are to succeed in our efforts to prevent more gun violence tragedies then an improved mental health care system is part of the solution.

I believe we must respond by drastically improving our community-based mental health services- including mobile crisis services, assertive community treatment, peer supports and supportive housing. These important mental health programs are in short supply all across our nation, which means that thousands of our friends and neighbors who desperately need help are stranded with nowhere to turn.

While no legislation can undo the terror that was done in Newtown, Connecticut, our nation has a moral obligation to act with the utmost urgency to reduce gun violence and save innocent lives. It is long past time to get to work, and I am ready to begin that work today.