



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

Sept. 6, 2019

Speaker Nancy Pelosi
1236 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy
2468 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
317 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader McConnell, and Leader Schumer:

The undersigned members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) and allies write to express concern about the wrongful scapegoating of people with mental health disabilities in the debate concerning gun violence prevention. CCD is the largest coalition of national organizations working together to advocate for federal public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, integration, and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society.

Like so many others, we are very concerned about the numbers of people harmed by gun violence—whether through mass shootings or through the great majority of gun violence incidents that do not involve mass shootings. And we are deeply disturbed by the efforts by some to cast gun violence as a “mental health issue.” First, the evidence could not be clearer that measures focusing on people with mental health disabilities are not the solution to gun violence. Moreover, falsely suggesting that people with mental health disabilities are a primary cause of gun violence creates fear and prejudice, and fuels an inaccurate narrative that people with mental health disabilities are violent. It also deters many people from seeking needed services.

The evidence is plain: people with mental health disabilities are responsible for only a very small fraction of violence. Studies have consistently shown that between 3% and 5% of violence is committed by people with mental health disabilities.¹ People with mental health disabilities

¹ James L. Knoll IV & George D. Annas, *Mass Shootings and Mental Illness*, in GUN VIOLENCE AND MENTAL ILLNESS 81, 90 (Dec. 2015), <https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/pdf/10.5555/appi.books.9781615371099>; Jonathan M. Metzl & Kenneth T. MacLeish, *Mental Illness, Mass Shootings, and the Politics of American Firearms*, 105 *American J. Pub. Health* 240, 241 (Feb. 2015),

are far more likely to be the victims of violence rather than the perpetrators.² To the extent that there are risk factors that are meaningful predictors of violence, they are factors other than a mental disability—such as a history of domestic violence or other violent act.³ Gun violence prevention efforts that focus on individuals with mental health disabilities do not serve any meaningful goal of significantly reducing violence.

As disability rights organizations, we are most concerned about the damage that is done by falsely associating mental health disabilities with violence. Doing so sends a harmful message, perpetuating unfounded stereotypes that people with mental health disabilities should be hated and avoided—as employees, as colleagues, as students, as tenants, as neighbors, or as friends. These myths and stereotypes hurt all people with disabilities and undermine all that we work to accomplish, including promoting community integration, quality education, full and fair employment, fair housing, and equal access to the mainstream of society. We urge you to ensure that any gun violence prevention proposals advanced by Congress focus on real solutions to gun violence, not on people with mental health disabilities.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

American Psychological Association

The Arc of the United States

Association of People Supporting Employment First

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4318286/pdf/AJPH.2014.302242.pdf>, Jeffrey W. Swanson et al., *Mental Illness and reduction of gun violence an suicide: bringing epidemiologic research to policy*, 25 *Annals of Epidemiology* 366, 368 (2015), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4211925/pdf/main.pdf>.

² Linda A. Teplin, ET AL., *Crime Victimization in Adults with Severe Mental Illness*, 62 *ARCH. GEN. PSYCHIATRY* 911, 914 (Aug. 2005) (“Over one quarter of the SMI sample had been victims of a violent crime (attempted or completed) in the past year, 11.8 times higher than the [general population] rates”); Heather Stuart, *Violence and Mental Illness: An Overview*, 2 *JOURNAL OF WORLD PSYCHIATRY* 121, 123 (June 2003) (“It is far more likely that people with a serious mental illness will be the victim of violence,” rather than its perpetrator.).

³ Eric B. Elbogen & Sally C. Johnson, *The Intricate Link Between Violence and Mental Disorder: Results from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions*, 66 *ARCH. GEN. PSYCHIATRY* 152 (Feb. 2009). See also Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, *Wrong Focus: Mental Health in the Gun Safety Debate* (Aug. 2019), <http://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Wrong-Focus-Mental-Health-in-the-Gun-Safety-Debate-2019-nh.pdf>.

American Dance Therapy Association
Autism Society of America
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Public Representation
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc.
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children
Epilepsy Foundation
Institute for Educational Leadership
Justice in Aging
Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Rights Protection and Advocacy
National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment
National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools
National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery
National Council on Independent Living
National Disability Institute
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Health Law Program
National LTBTQ Task Force Action Fund

National PTA

Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

RespectAbility

School Social Work Association of America

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