



December 20, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President
United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As members of the Jesuit Secondary Education Association, the network of Jesuit high schools located throughout the United States, we join our hearts to those at the Sandy Hook Elementary School who are the most recent victims of “A violence that shatters the peace of us all.” A sense of deep mourning at the murders of twenty children and five educators has entered our lives, and we stand with our sisters and brothers of Newtown and offer our comfort and our prayers for them.

In addition we join our voices and commit our efforts to theirs against violence and the proliferation of guns in our society. The deaths of innocent children and their teachers are the latest in a terrible trend in violence in our country related to easy access to assault guns and ammunition. As educators ourselves, we cannot stand idly by and allow this to continue in a country we love and to the people we serve.

On September 13, 2004, the Assault Weapons Ban of 1994 expired without action by Congress to extend it. A recent analysis by the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence found that during the ten years the Assault Weapons Ban was in place, the number of banned assault weapons used in crimes declined by more than 65%. The failed legislation (S. 1034), would have extended the ban for another ten years, and the cumulative effect of fewer guns on our streets would have increased the decline in gun-related crime already experienced.

We are inspired by our Catholic bishops who, in the document, “Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration,” reiterate their support for legislative efforts that seek to protect society from the violence associated with ready access to deadly weapons. In that document they state, “We support measures that control the sale and use of firearms and make them safer, and we reiterate our call for their sensible regulation.” We forcefully join our voices to that of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, retired archbishop of Washington, DC, who in 2003 wrote to the White House, as well as to members of the House and Senate, asking them to support the re-authorization of the Assault Weapons Ban.

Along with the Catholic bishops of the United States and with the school community of Newtown we declare our unfettered support for legislation that would ban the sale of assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines, and require background check for gun sales. We support those who are sponsoring this legislation, and we encourage others to join in this effort.

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Fifty years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people." We can no longer remain silent. Columbine, Virginia Tech, Binghamton, Aurora, Tucson, Oak Creek, and now Newtown are names that come to mind all too readily. As men and women who care for children and young adults every single day, we cannot risk another life because of our inaction at this most critical time. Please speak out clearly with us to reinstate the Assault Weapons Ban.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James Stoeger, S.J.".

Rev. James A. Stoeger, S.J.
President, JSEA

cc: Robert Perrotta, J.D., Ed.D, Chair, JSEA
Rev. Robert Reiser, S.J.