

EMBARGOED UNTIL THE START OF THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

January 16, 2013

**Now Is the Time: The President's Plan to Protect our Children and our Communities
by Reducing Gun Violence**

Our nation has suffered too much at the hands of dangerous people who use guns to commit horrific acts of violence. As President Obama said following the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy, "We won't be able to stop every violent act, but if there is even one thing that we can do to prevent any of these events, we have a deep obligation, all of us, to try."

Most gun owners are responsible and law-abiding, and they use their guns safely. The President strongly believes that the Second Amendment guarantees an individual right to bear arms. But to better protect our children and our communities from tragic mass shootings like those in Newtown, Aurora, Oak Creek, and Tucson, there are four common-sense steps we can take right now.

The President's plan includes: (1) closing background check loopholes to keep guns out of dangerous hands; (2) banning military-style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, and taking other common-sense steps to reduce gun violence; (3) making schools safer; and (4) increasing access to mental health services. Highlights of this comprehensive plan include:

- ✓ **Require criminal background checks for all gun sales.**
- ✓ **Take four executive actions to ensure information on dangerous individuals is available to the background check system.**
- ✓ **Reinstate and strengthen the assault weapons ban.**
- ✓ **Restore the 10-round limit on ammunition magazines.**
- ✓ **Protect police by finishing the job of getting rid of armor-piercing bullets.**
- ✓ **Give law enforcement additional tools to prevent and prosecute gun crime.**
- ✓ **End the freeze on gun violence research.**
- ✓ **Make our schools safer with more school resource officers and school counselors, safer climates, and better emergency response plans.**
- ✓ **Help ensure that young people get the mental health treatment they need.**
- ✓ **Ensure health insurance plans cover mental health benefits.**

While no law or set of laws will end gun violence, it is clear that the American people want action. If even one child's life can be saved, then we need to act. Now is the time to do the right thing for our children, our communities, and the country we love.

TAKING EXECUTIVE ACTION TO DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TODAY

The President is determined to do all he can within existing authorities, and today, he will announce 23 new executive actions to make progress right away. These actions will: help make sure information about potentially dangerous people who are barred from having guns is available to the national background check system; lift the ban on research into the causes of gun violence; make sure doctors know they can report credible threats of violence by their patients; put more resource officers and counselors in schools; and ensure millions of Americans get quality mental health coverage.

CALLING ON CONGRESS TO TAKE COMMON-SENSE STEPS

Congress must also do its part. To prevent mass shootings and other gun violence, Congress should take critical steps through new legislation, including: requiring background checks for all gun sales; reinstating the prohibition on high-capacity magazines; renewing and strengthening the ban on assault weapons; and creating serious penalties for gun traffickers who help put guns into the hands of criminals.

1. CLOSING BACKGROUND CHECK LOOPHOLES TO KEEP GUNS OUT OF DANGEROUS HANDS

Most gun owners buy their guns legally and use them safely, whether for self-defense, hunting or sport shooting. Yet too often, irresponsible and dangerous individuals have been able to easily get their hands on firearms. We must strengthen our efforts to keep guns from falling into the wrong hands.

- **REQUIRE BACKGROUND CHECKS ON ALL GUN SALES:** Felons, fugitives, and others who are legally prohibited from having a gun should not be able to use loopholes to get one. Right now, federally licensed firearms dealers are required to run background checks on those buying guns, but studies estimate that nearly 40 percent of all gun sales are made by private sellers who are exempt from this requirement. As the President said following the Newtown tragedy, keeping guns out of the wrong hands starts with legislation to require background checks for all gun sales, with limited, common-sense exceptions for cases like certain transfers among family members and temporary transfers for hunting and sporting purposes. In addition, the Administration will provide licensed dealers with guidance on how they can run background checks on private sales today.
- **FOUR EXECUTIVE ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE BACKGROUND CHECK SYSTEM:** The background check system is highly efficient and effective; during its 14 years in existence, the system has helped keep more than 1.5 million guns out of the wrong hands. The system is able to make 92 percent of background check determinations on the spot. But we must do a better job ensuring the background check system has access to complete information about

potentially dangerous individuals. Today the Administration is taking four actions to strengthen the system:

- Addressing unnecessary legal barriers in health laws that prevent some states from making information available about those prohibited from having guns.
- Improving incentives for states to share information with the system.
- Ensuring federal agencies share relevant information with the system.
- Directing the Attorney General to work with other agencies to review our laws to make sure they are effective at identifying the dangerous or untrustworthy individuals that should not have access to guns.

2. BANNING MILITARY-STYLE ASSAULT WEAPONS AND HIGH-CAPACITY MAGAZINES, AND TAKING OTHER COMMON-SENSE STEPS TO REDUCE GUN VIOLENCE

We need to do more to prevent easy access to instruments of mass violence. We also need to provide law enforcement with additional tools to prevent gun violence, end the freeze on gun violence research, make sure health care providers know they can report credible threats of violence and talk to their patients about gun safety, and promote responsible gun ownership.

- **GET MILITARY-STYLE ASSAULT WEAPONS AND HIGH-CAPACITY MAGAZINES OFF THE STREETS:** Several recent mass shootings involved high-capacity ammunition magazines that were prohibited from 1994 to 2004. Many of the mass shooters used the type of semiautomatic rifles that were the target of the assault weapons ban. It is time for Congress to renew the 10-round limit on magazines, and reinstate and strengthen the assault weapons ban.
- **PROTECT POLICE BY GETTING RID OF ARMOR-PIERCING BULLETS:** The President also is calling for legislation to finish the job of getting armor-piercing bullets off the streets by prohibiting the possession and transfer of this dangerous ammunition, in addition to its manufacture and import.
- **GIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT ADDITIONAL TOOLS TO PREVENT AND PROSECUTE GUN CRIME:** We owe law enforcement the tools they need to keep us safe. The President will:
 - Call for Congress to pass the Administration's \$4 billion proposal to help communities keep 15,000 cops on the street.
 - Call for Congress to pass new gun trafficking laws, which will impose serious penalties on those who help get guns into the hands of criminals.
 - Take executive action to enhance gun tracing data by requiring federal law enforcement to trace all recovered guns.
 - Propose regulations that will enable law enforcement to run complete background checks before returning seized firearms
 - Nominate, and call for Congress to confirm, a director for the ATF.
 - Call for Congress to remove restrictions that require ATF to authorize importation of dangerous weapons simply because of their age.
 - Maximize enforcement efforts to prevent gun violence and prosecute gun crime.
 - Direct the Department of Justice to analyze information on lost and stolen guns and make it widely available to law enforcement.
 - Provide effective training for state and local law enforcement, first responders, and school officials on how to handle active shooter situations.

- **END THE FREEZE ON GUN VIOLENCE RESEARCH, INVESTIGATE THE CAUSES AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE, AND EXPLORE THE IMPACT OF VIOLENT MEDIA IMAGES AND VIDEO GAMES:** For years, Congress has subjected the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to restrictions ensuring it does not “advocate or promote gun control,” and some members of Congress have claimed this restriction prohibits the CDC from conducting any research on the causes of gun violence. However, public health research on gun violence is not advocacy. The President is directing the CDC and other research agencies to conduct research into the causes and prevention of gun violence, and the CDC is announcing that they will begin this research. The Administration is calling on Congress to provide \$10 million for the CDC to conduct further research, including investigating the relationship between video games, media images, and violence.
- **PRESERVE THE RIGHTS OF DOCTORS TO PROTECT THEIR PATIENTS AND COMMUNITIES FROM GUN VIOLENCE:** Doctors and other mental health professionals play an important role in protecting the safety of their patients and the broader community. The Administration is clarifying that no federal law in any way prohibits doctors or other health care providers from reporting their patients’ threats of violence to the authorities, and issuing guidance making clear that the Affordable Care Act does not prevent doctors from talking to patients about gun safety.
- **ENCOURAGE GUN OWNERS TO LIVE UP TO THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO STORE GUNS SAFELY:** The President believes that the Second Amendment guarantees an individual right to bear arms, and he respects our nation’s rich hunting and sport shooting traditions. But this right comes with a responsibility to safely store guns to prevent them from accidentally or intentionally being used to harm others. To that end, the President will launch a national responsible gun ownership campaign. The Administration will also encourage the development of new technology that will make it easier for gun owners to safely use and store their guns, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission will assess the need for new safety standards for gun locks and gun safes to make sure they actually work to keep guns safe.

3. MAKING SCHOOLS SAFER

We need to enhance the physical security of our schools and our ability to respond to emergencies like mass shootings, and also create safer and more nurturing school climates. Each school is different and should have the flexibility to address its most pressing needs. Some schools will want trained and armed police; others may prefer increased counseling services. Either way, each district should be able to choose what is best to protect its own students. The Administration is proposing to:

- **GIVE LOCAL COMMUNITIES THE OPPORTUNITY TO HIRE UP TO 1,000 SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS AND SCHOOL COUNSELORS:** School resource officers, school psychologists, social workers, and school counselors all have a role to play in keeping our students safe. We can help schools fill these roles by using this year’s COPS program to provide incentives for more police departments to hire school resource officers. And today, the President is proposing a new, comprehensive school safety initiative to help local school districts hire up to 1,000 school resource officers and school-based mental health professionals, as well as make other investments in school safety. The Department of Justice will also develop a model for using school resource officers, including best practices for working with students.
- **ENSURE EVERY SCHOOL HAS A COMPREHENSIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN:** Many schools have plans for responding to emergencies like mass shootings, but too often, their plans are incomplete and their students and staff are not trained to follow them. The Administration will help schools, houses of worship, and institutions of higher education develop these plans, call on Congress to provide the resources for schools to implement them, and require those receiving safety funding from the Department of Education to have high-quality plans in place for all of their schools.
- **CREATE SAFER SCHOOL CLIMATES:** Making our schools safer is not just about cops and security cameras; we also need to improve the climate of our schools to reduce violence and bullying (which sometimes precedes a mass casualty event). The Administration is proposing to help 8,000 schools put in place proven strategies to reduce bullying, drug abuse, violence, and other problem behaviors, and to gather and share best practices on school discipline.

4. IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Though the vast majority of Americans with a mental illness are not violent, we need to do more to identify mental health issues early and help individuals get the treatment they need before dangerous situations develop. As President Obama has said, “We are going to need to work on making access to mental health care as easy as access to a gun.”

- **MAKE SURE STUDENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS GET TREATMENT FOR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES:** Three quarters of mental illnesses appear by the age of 24, yet less than half of children with diagnosable mental health problems receive treatment. To increase access to mental health services for young people, we should:
 - Provide “Mental Health First Aid” training to help teachers and staff recognize signs of mental illness in young people and refer them to treatment.

- Support young adults ages 16 to 25, who have the highest rates of mental illness but are the least likely to seek help, by giving incentives to help states develop innovative approaches.
- Help break the cycle of violence in schools facing pervasive violence with a new, targeted initiative to provide their students with needed services like counseling.
- Train 5,000 more social workers, counselors, and psychologists, with a focus on those serving students and young adults.
- **ENSURE COVERAGE OF MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT:** The Affordable Care Act is the largest step to increase access to mental health services in a generation, providing health coverage for 30 million Americans, including 6 to 10 million people with mental illness. The Administration will take executive actions to ensure that millions of newly covered Americans, and millions more who already have health insurance, get quality mental health coverage by:
 - Finalizing regulations to require insurance plans to cover mental health benefits like medical and surgical benefits.
 - Ensuring Medicaid is meeting its obligation to cover mental health equally.

CALLING ON ALL AMERICANS TO DO MORE

None of these problems can be solved by laws alone. All Americans must do their part. Gun owners have a responsibility to make sure their guns are safely stored. If a gun is lost or stolen, it is important to report it to local authorities. Parents, teachers, and school counselors need to stay involved in young people's lives, and if they need help, show them how to get it. A trained professional who concludes that a patient poses a serious threat to himself or others has a duty to report it. The entertainment and video game industries have a responsibility to give parents tools and choices about the movies and programs their children watch and the games their children play. As President Obama said, "This job of keeping our children safe and teaching them well is something we can only do together, with the help of friends and neighbors, the help of a community and the help of a nation." The President, the Vice President, and other Administration leaders will continue to work with Americans from all walks of life to look for more ways to help.