

Gun Violence Prevention Lobbying Speech

By Evan Portnoy, Eliana Praver-Stock, Gabe Silver, Emerson Singer, and Maddie M (from Beth El Synagogue

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Today we are here to continue the conversation regarding gun violence prevention. My name is Eliana Praver-Stock. This is Evan, this is Gabe, and this is Emerson. Most of us go to Beth Emet Synagogue in Evanston, IL which is in fact Representative Schakowsky's very own synagogue, and this is Maddie, who goes to temple Beth El. Thank you for taking time out of your very busy day to meet with us, and to discuss the ever-growing threat of gun violence in the United States, and how to combat the issue. We are here in Washington DC as part of a program through the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism. Today we are here to talk with you specifically about gun violence prevention and to share with you our personal stories. Last year, Evanston Township High School, the school that I attend, went on a 3 hour lockdown. This put our safety in school into a new perspective, especially because we live in a very liberal city that is largely for gun control. In my liberal bubble most families do not own guns. This made the lockdown at ETHS particularly jarring for me. Even when you think you're safe, BOOM! The truth is that no one is safe from guns in the United States.

My name is Maddie and I live in Northbrook, which is about 15 minutes from Highland Park, which was just another location of a mass shooting in the United States. This specific shooting is especially egregious because it took place on July 4th, 2022. This day is normally meant to celebrate the country, but instead it was just another disappointment. Families spent this holiday grieving not only their family members, but also the system that let them down once again, instead of celebrating. Personally, during this day I was in Spain on a language immersion program. July 4th, 2022 was supposed to be a fun day in Spain spent with friends and our host families. We played kickball, and had a barbecue to celebrate our country, but it did not end this way for me. I won't lie, when I first heard about the shooting in Highland Park I wasn't angry, frustrated, or upset at first. I didn't have the same first reaction as others. I'm numb to this in a way. However, my thoughts quickly shifted while playing catch with friends. My thoughts shifted from "wow, north shore Chicago is never in the news" to hysterical sobs to my group leaders from Spain wondering how and why this happened, and why it wasn't prevented in the first place in America. While no one in my family or any of my friends from Highland Park were hurt, it does not take away from the fact that there needs to be change. No one else understood exactly what I was going through during this time because I was the only one from the Chicago land area of those I went to Spain with. I ended up feeling not only stuck, but also hopeless. Being halfway across the world, I didn't know what to do or how to help, I was helpless, which is just a fraction of what I imagine the victims of not only the shooting in Highland Park, but also Buffalo, New York, Parkland, Florida, Ulvade, Texas, and the other 607 shootings just this year. Being in this situation I had the choice to either push the problem under the rug, return to the

barbeque and act like everything was fine with me, like nothing happened, but it's time to stop acting like that. I realized after this day that if I want to see change, I have to be that change I want to see. It's time to realize that gun violence is a bigger problem than ever, and that 611 shootings in one year is 611 too many. I chose to speak up, because that is the change we need to see. I decided to talk to my friends, the other members of my groups, I checked in on my friends and family, and that is what brings me here today, to instill change, to ensure this never happens again.

Being part of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism allows us to be here today and share our stories and views regarding gun violence, and how to combat the issues at hand while considering our religious values as Jewish highschoolers. In the Torah and the Talmud, there are quotes such as, "do not stand idly by while your neighbor's blood is shed" (Leviticus 19:16), or "He who takes one life, it is as though he has destroyed the universe, and he who saves one life, it is as though he has saved the universe." (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5). Although these were written thousands of years ago, it is important to note that they are still relevant in today's society. These are important to our cause because, as mass shootings and domestic gun violence continue to become a more prevalent issue, and with each year recording higher homicides due to gun violence than the previous, it is more important now than ever to find a solution to this escalating problem. We need to take action, and we need to do it now in order to prevent further casualties. As your constituents, we are asking you to be our voice on the senate floor. We hope that you will take into consideration the Jewish values that were listed today, because they are a crucial part of why the Reform Jewish Movement so strongly believes in laws dedicated to gun violence prevention.

(Again) My name is Evan Portnoy, and I, also, have had a personal experience regarding gun violence. Around this time last year, I walked to school, similar to any other day, because there was no reason to think otherwise. I made it through my first period and walked into my Freshman Advisory class ready to study for my biology quiz, which I had the next period. As I sat down and pulled out my notebook, I heard a low beep followed by a high tone, which played over the intercom, signifying an upcoming announcement. However, instead of the normal, friendly voice of the Vice Principal I expected to hear, a prerecorded message started to play. It read as follows: "Lockdown, Lockdown, go to the nearest classroom and secure it". Remembering the drills for a situation like this, my classmates and I sat vulnerable in the corner of the room with the lights off, doors locked, waiting and hoping we were safe. Neither me nor my classmates knew exactly what was going on, which fueled a sense of foreboding throughout the classroom. Eventually I found out that there were guns in the school. After that, every noise felt like a gunshot and every text like it could be my last. The next 2 hours felt like 4. I told my family and friends I loved them and did anything but address the gravity of the situation. Finally a real voice over the intercom cut through the silence telling us that the situation was under control and that the police department was conducting a search. 45 minutes later we were

released to go home without ceremony. What I learned in school that day wasn't history. I learned that Evanston is not the safe paradise I naively thought it was. I learned that irrational kids could get their hands on lethal weapons capable of ending my life with the pull of a trigger. And most importantly I learned that gun violence needs to stop.

Ms. Durkin, as we have previously stated, today we are here on a mission. As you know, congress is currently trying to pass the Bipartisan Background Check Expansion Act. As we understand it, Representative Schakowsky supported the original Bipartisan Background Checks Act when it was first passed in 2021, and we would like to thank her for demonstrating her commitment to preventing gun violence and mass shootings. Additionally, it would be much appreciated if Representative Schakowsky brought that same attitude to the senate floor in 2023, when the 118th congress votes on the Bipartisan Background Check Expansion Act. As you can tell, this issue is extremely important to us and many other young people like us, and should be important to everyone.

We really appreciate your consideration and your time. We hope you continue to support gun control prevention laws, including the Background Check Expansion Act, in the 118th Congress. We would like to thank you again for taking time to listen to our perspectives on this issue, and we hope you have a wonderful rest of the day.