

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 12, 2014

Dr. Tom Frieden  
Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Director Frieden:

We write to you today regarding the state of research into the causes and prevention of gun violence at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The President explicitly directed the CDC to conduct or sponsor research into this critical area over 18 months ago, and a multi-year potential research agenda developed by the Institute of Medicine has been available for over a year. We are, therefore, requesting information regarding the CDC's efforts over the last year to begin studying this field, what barriers to further progress remain, what timeline for results has been established and to urge the CDC to publicly share its plan for research into gun violence at the earliest possible opportunity.

In 1996, Congress included a rider in the annual appropriations bill that prohibited agencies from *lobbying* on behalf of gun control. Unfortunately, this rider was *misinterpreted* by some not as a ban on supporting legislative efforts to limit access to firearms, but as a ban on supporting scientific research into the causes of gun violence. This rider, which was included in every subsequent annual appropriations bill, thus had the unfortunate consequence of blocking all efforts by the federal government to study gun violence.

In a Presidential Memorandum issued on January 16, 2013, President Obama made clear that research by federal agencies into this issue is allowed under current law. Additionally, President Obama directed that the CDC play a central role in research into gun violence.

The Secretary of Health and Human Services (Secretary), through the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other scientific agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services, shall conduct or sponsor research into the causes of gun violence and the ways to prevent it. The Secretary shall begin by identifying the most pressing research questions with the greatest potential public health impact, and by assessing existing public health interventions being implemented across the Nation to prevent gun violence.<sup>1</sup>

In June 2013, the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies released a report entitled "Priorities for Research to Reduce the Threat of Firearm-Related Violence"<sup>2</sup>, in response to a direct request by the CDC and the CDC Foundation. The report details a comprehensive multi-year research agenda into the issue of gun violence, including the study of its root causes, risk factors for gun violence, and how to prevent it.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/16/presidential-memorandum-engaging-public-health-research-causes-and-preve>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2013/Priorities-for-Research-to-Reduce-the-Threat-of-Firearm-Related-Violence.aspx>

Unfortunately, there have been no clear signs that the CDC is beginning to implement this agenda. In the annual appropriations bill enacted into law last year, the CDC received \$151 million for injury prevention and control<sup>3</sup>, including funds for both Intentional Injury and Unintentional Injury. Gun violence research clearly fits squarely into these funds. CDC also receives additional funds for Public Health Scientific Services and Cross-Cutting Activities and Program Supports that may be appropriate for start-up of new, critical public health data, research and programs.

President Obama has also requested that \$10 million be explicitly provided by Congress in the CDC's budget for gun violence research in both of the last two years. Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) and Senator Markey have also introduced bills to authorize \$10 million in appropriations for research for each of the next six years. These bills were endorsed by a significant number of nationally respected medical and scientific organizations, including the American Medical Association, American Psychological Association, Society for the Advancement of Violence and Injury Research, National Physicians Alliance, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.<sup>4</sup>

In the eighteen months since the horrific Newtown shooting, our nation has been rocked by dozens of mass shootings. The sad tally of mass shootings touches practically every facet of life in America. It includes places as welcoming as a coastal university in California. It includes places as ubiquitous as a shopping mall in Maryland and a Wal-Mart in Nevada. It includes places as seemingly safe as an army base in Texas and a naval office in Washington, DC. And it includes over forty schools.<sup>5</sup>

Gun violence kills or injures more than 10,000 children a year.<sup>6</sup> It kills more than 30,000 people each year.<sup>7</sup> It destroys families and damages communities. It is a public health crisis in every sense of the word, and it is critical that we treat it as such. Part of these efforts must include serious substantive research into the problem of gun violence in order to better craft additional strategies with which to combat it.

In order to better understand the CDC's current ability and plans to address the problem of gun violence, please respond to the following questions and requests for information:

- 1) Please provide a summary of any steps that the CDC has taken toward studying the causes of gun violence since July 2013. Please include implementation plans, budgets, timelines, and milestones: What additional staff recruitment, if any, is planned? What are the priorities for external funding opportunities, and when will they be made available? When will preliminary research results be available?

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2015/assets/hhs.pdf> at page 447; see also <http://www.cdc.gov/fmo/topic/budget%20Information/FY-2015-Fact-Sheets/CDC-Overview.pdf> at 2.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.markey.senate.gov/news/press-releases/sen-markey-and-rep-maloney-introduce-legislation-to-fund-gun-violence-research>

<sup>5</sup> <http://everytown.org/press/new-analysis-breaks-down-44-school-shootings-since-sandy-hook-tragedy/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://thinkprogress.org/health/2014/01/27/3206581/kids-gun-violence-killed-injuries/>

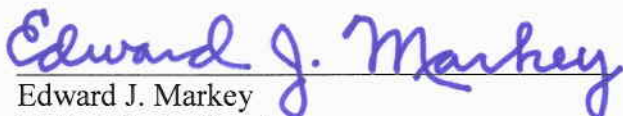
<sup>7</sup> <http://www.vpc.org/aboutvpc.htm>




- 2) How many persons currently employed by the CDC are recognized subject matter experts on the causes and prevention of gun violence? Please also describe on what specific elements of gun violence and on what basis (e.g. publications, peers, professional participation) they are considered experts.
- 3) It is our understanding that some research teams on dedicated topics at the CDC have historically been as small as two or three permanent staff, and that teams may detail additional expertise from across the agency. Has CDC constituted a dedicated gun violence research team? If so, how many permanent staff and how much funding comprise the team? How many additional staff have contributed a portion of their time to this topic, and how much total time and funding has been expended? Is there a working group, task force or other formalized staff effort on gun violence research and prevention, and if so please describe it?
- 4) Since the January 2013 Presidential Memorandum was issued, have any barriers to further planning and implementation been identified? What reservations do you have of directing some general injury prevention and control monies, including those specified for intentional and unintentional injuries, to intentional and unintentional gun injuries? Do any internal guidelines currently exist that discourage the use of these funds to research causes and prevention of gun violence? If so, please provide copies.
- 5) Have staff with any academic, non-governmental, or private entities reached out to the CDC to offer their assistance or collaboration with research into the causes or prevention of gun violence, or to inquire about funding opportunities or to submit unsolicited proposals? If so, please provide the names of all such organizations as well as copies of CDC's responses thereto.
- 6) How many research projects related to gun violence were either directly or indirectly supported by the CDC between 1985 and 1996? Please provide a short summary of such each research project, including key subject matter experts who contributed to the work.

Thank you. Please contact Justin Slaughter in Senator Markey's office with any questions by calling 202-224-2742. We request that you respond to this letter by October 30, 2014.

Sincerely,

  
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

  
Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator

*Kirsten Gillibrand*

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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

*Richard Blumenthal*

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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

*Brian Schatz*

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Brian Schatz  
United States Senator