

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 14, 2018

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Alexander and Senator Murray,

As Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP), you have repeatedly demonstrated your commitment to finding solutions to public health crises that affect our country. We ask that you continue this leadership by including S.834, a bill to fund gun violence prevention research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), on the HELP Committee's next Executive Session agenda.

According to the CDC, gun violence is a leading cause of death in the United States — each year, we lose more than 33,000 lives due to firearm deaths. Our medical professionals have been vocal in recognizing gun violence as a public health crisis. Both the American Public Health Association and the American Medical Association consider gun violence a public health problem and have called for a comprehensive public health response and solution.

As part of this response, the American Medical Association identified research into gun violence prevention as a critical priority. Other medical professionals have similarly advocated for research into firearms. In 2016, representatives from 42 public health schools and 17 leading public health and gun violence prevention organizations convened in Massachusetts to address gun violence as a public health crisis. Their recommendations were subsequently published in the American Journal of Public Health — the first of which was to bolster gun violence research and scholarship.

For over twenty years, an appropriations rider known as the Dickey Amendment has limited federal research into gun violence. The Dickey Amendment prevents the CDC from using funds to “advocate or promote gun control,” but it has been widely and inappropriately construed as a ban on gun violence prevention research. As a result, gun violence is the least-researched and second-least funded cause of death in relation to mortality rates. This should be deeply concerning to all of us. We must understand the components of this problem if we ever hope to mitigate it. When faced with other public health issues, we invest in research to find sound, evidence-based policy solutions. An epidemic that kills an average of 96 Americans each day demands this same response.

Last month, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar committed to resuming gun violence prevention research at the CDC. When asked at a House Energy and Commerce

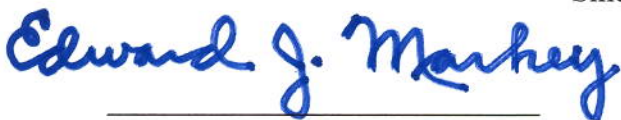
Committee hearing whether he would “be proactive” in supporting gun violence prevention research, he responded:

“We certainly will. Our Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — we’re in the science business and the evidence-generating business, and so I will have our agency certainly working in this field, as they do across the broad spectrum of disease control and prevention.”

We were pleased to hear that Secretary Azar intends to conduct gun violence prevention research at the CDC and believe the agency can and should begin that work immediately. But additional funds are also necessary to fully bolster this initiative. S.834 would help fix this problem. S.834 authorizes \$10 million in funding for each fiscal year through 2023 for the CDC to conduct or support firearms safety or gun violence prevention research.

In the wake of the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, it has become increasingly clear that gun violence in America is going to continue unabated until Congress takes meaningful action. We believe we have long passed the threshold of a moral responsibility to do so. On behalf of families across the country, we urge you to join medical professionals in recognizing gun violence as a public health issue, and respectfully request that the HELP Committee consider S.834 at its next Executive Session.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Bill Nelson
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



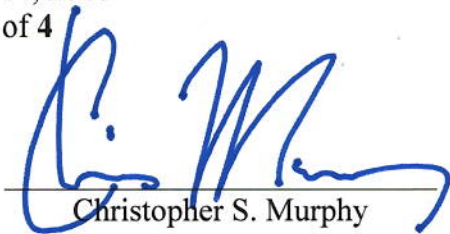
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United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
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Mazie K. Hirono
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Christopher A. Coons
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Ron Wyden
United States Senator



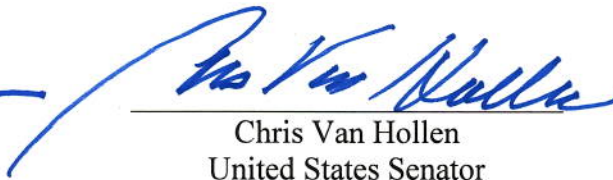
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United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator




Chris Van Hollen
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Tom Carper
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