



March 13, 2018

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the three million members of the National Education Association (NEA) and the 50 million students they serve, we write to offer our views on the *STOP School Violence Act of 2018* (H.R. 4909) which is scheduled for a vote on Wednesday. We feel it is important that we express both our agreement and displeasure with particular elements of this bill and outline policies that should be implemented to address gun violence not only in our schools but across the country.

For too long, Congress has failed to take any common sense steps to end the uniquely American epidemic of gun violence, including mass shootings. America's gun homicide rate is 25 times the average of other developed countries. On an average day, 96 Americans are killed with guns. Sadly, 47 American teens and children are shot and killed or injured on an average day, [according to the Centers for Disease Control](#). As a country, we can and must do more to ensure our citizens' safety, including everyone who walks through our schools' doors — educators, students, parents and community members.

We are pleased to see that the revised bill includes language prohibiting the use of funds for providing firearms or training in the use of firearms to school personnel and educators, and we urge the inclusion of this prohibition in any future legislation. NEA members overwhelmingly reject the idea of arming educators to address the problem of school shootings. We need fewer guns in schools not more of them. [According to Everytown for Gun Safety](#), the presence of guns increases the risks posed to children, and school safety experts and law enforcement groups oppose arming educators. Educators should be educating their students, not acting as armed security guards.

All students should feel safe, which we believe can be achieved without making private schools fiscal agents of public funds which this bill would allow – a change from existing law. There are ways for private schools to access the same information and services, such as equitable participation included in the Every Student Succeeds Act, without Congress sending federal dollars to private schools.

We are also concerned about provisions in this legislation that raise important civil rights concerns. While the bill attempts to address potential school safety concerns through reporting mechanisms and coordination with local law enforcement, it does not contain due process protections, redress for false reporting of students, and would require school personnel to use pre-determined checklists that could alter their view of students. We raise these concerns in light of the zero-tolerance disciplinary policies instituted over the past three decades that helped create

and perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline, which disproportionately affects students of color and students with disabilities. We urge you to include safeguards to prevent unnecessary and unjust expulsion of students of color and other marginalized communities and deny them due process rights. Further, we believe the Administration's stated plans of repealing existing school discipline guidance is irrelevant to this debate and should not go further.

While this bill is narrowly focused on schools, Congress will have failed to truly protect our citizens if it does not do more. Congress should take immediate steps to require universal background checks to purchase any gun and ban assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, and bump stocks. Further, we cannot turn our schools into de facto prisons - we need fewer guns in schools, not more. Instead, increase funding and access to school-based mental health services and address the shortage of counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists in schools. We should also expand and increase professional development for all educators in the areas of bullying, mental and behavioral health, cultural competencies and classroom management.

We stand ready to work with Congress to take common sense steps to ensure dangerous weapons do not end up in dangerous hands and to finally end this American epidemic that continues to take countless lives and shatter families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Egan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marc Egan  
Director of Government Relations  
National Education Association