

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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We Must Treat Gun Violence As a National Crisis

The Massachusetts Teachers Association, Massachusetts Nurses Association, American Federation of Teachers - Massachusetts, and Massachusetts School Nurse Organization have released the following statement demanding action be taken to enact sensible national gun laws. Our union and organization members stand in solidarity with March For Our Lives in the fight against gun violence.

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us important lessons about the impact of a public health crisis on public education and our health care system. The closing of schools and colleges — and then the dramatically altered ways in which they needed to operate under pandemic conditions — posed significant challenges for students, families, patients, and our communities.

Yet we understood that failing to take bold steps to keep people safe during the pandemic would cause even deeper pain.

Now we must treat gun violence as a national crisis.

As educators and nurses, we cannot right now in good conscience tell our students, patients, and their families that they are completely safe in their schools — or even their hospitals and health care centers.

The massacre in Uvalde, Texas, the killing of four people — including two doctors — in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and other mass murders must be seen for what they are, and we must immediately do everything we can to stop the perpetuation of this violent cycle. These shootings are terrorizing our students and our communities every week and every day.

The political and legal shielding of gun violence, driven by the financial influence of the National Rifle Association and other groups, is eating away at the fabric of our society. It puts students in Massachusetts and across our country in danger and jeopardizes their social well-being and mental health.

Esoteric discussions about “inalienable rights” regarding firearms wither in the face of the image of 19 fourth-graders and two educators murdered by a young man wielding

an assault rifle he purchased right after his 18th birthday — just as such false argumentation should have been abandoned after Columbine. After Sandy Hook. After Parkland.

Students and families deserve the right to go about their lives without fear of being murdered at random — just as they should be able to access public schools and colleges without unnecessary fear of contracting or spreading COVID-19.

As is the case with any public health crisis, we know that no plan is guaranteed to work 100 percent of the time.

But we know that more can be — and must be — done to address gun violence. We support sensible national laws that expand background checks and close loopholes allowing easy access to firearms. We support national bans on the high-powered assault weapons that turn schools and other places into combat zones that police themselves fear to enter.

We look forward to the day when we can reasonably tell American students, patients, and families: “You are safe here.”