

June 20, 2019

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer,

It has been over 100 days since the House of Representatives passed H.R. 8, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019. As leading academic researchers who work to build evidence for policies to reduce firearm violence and suicide, we write in support of universal background checks and ask you bring this important piece of legislation to the Senate floor for a vote.

We know that successful implementation of existing or expanded firearm prohibitions in federal or state law depends on having a background check on all firearm transfers. Current federal law only requires a background check when a firearm is purchased from a licensed firearms dealer, not when a firearm is purchased from a private, unlicensed seller. If we continue to allow prohibited purchasers to obtain firearms through private sales without a background check, the risk of firearm misuse will threaten public safety. We respect the importance of allowing states to enact laws that align with the values of their voters. However, research has demonstrated that inconsistent implementation of background checks across states and incomplete enforcement within states reduces the value of the legislation and results in more deaths. This life-saving tool must be truly comprehensive.

Background checks are the foundation of all policies designed to keep guns away from high-risk individuals. New and existing firearm prohibitions cannot be fully enforced without a background check on all gun sales. In 2017, there were nearly 40,000 gun deaths in the United States -- over 100 every day, on average. In order to begin to ameliorate the public health crisis of gun-related violence and suicide, the Senate must follow the House of Representatives' lead and bring this critical piece of legislation to the Senate floor for a vote.

Sincerely,

Joye Anestis, PhD
Nina Bell Suggs Professor of Psychology
University of Southern Mississippi

Marian Betz, MD, MPH
Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine
University of Colorado School of Medicine

Michael D. Anestis, PhD
Associate Professor
University of Southern Mississippi

Charles Branas, PhD
Chair and Gelman Endowed
Professor of Epidemiology
Columbia University

Paul S. Appelbaum, MD
Dollard Professor of Psychiatry,
Medicine & Law
Columbia University
Consortium for Risk Based Firearm Policy

Sara Brandspigel, MPH
Research Instructor
Colorado School of Public Health

Amy Barnhorst, MD
Vice Chair for Community Mental Health
University of California, Davis
Consortium for Risk Based Firearm Policy

Ashley Brooks-Russell, PhD, MPH
Assistant Professor
University of Colorado Anschutz
Medical Campus

Craig J. Bryan, PsyD, ABPP
Executive Director
National Center for Veterans Studies at
The University of Utah

Julia Buckner, MA, MS, PhD
Professor & Director of Clinical Training
Louisiana State University

Daniel Capron, PhD
Nina Bell Suggs Professor of Psychology
University of Southern Mississippi

Cassandra Crifasi, PhD, MPH
Assistant Professor, Deputy Director
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public
Health, Center for Gun Policy and Research

Michele Easter, PhD
Assistant Professor
Duke University School of Medicine

Liza H. Gold, MD
Clinical Professor of Psychiatry
Georgetown University School of Medicine
Consortium for Risk Based Firearm Policy

Sheldon Greenberg, PhD
Professor, School of Education
Division of Public Safety Leadership
Johns Hopkins University
Consortium for Risk Based Firearm Policy

Aaron Kivisto PhD, HSPP
Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology
University of Indianapolis

Alexander McCourt, JD, PhD, MPH
Assistant Scientist
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg
School of Public Health

Beth McGinty, PhD
Consortium for Risk Based Firearm Policy

John Monahan, PhD
Shannon Distinguished Professor of Law
University of Virginia
Consortium for Risk Based Firearm Policy

Emma Moscardini, BS
Clinical Psychology Graduate Student
Louisiana State University

Paul S. Nestadt, MD
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry
Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

George Parker, MD
Professor of Clinical Psychiatry
Indiana University
Consortium for Risk Based Firearm Policy

Jesenia Pizarro, MA, PhD
Associate Professor
Arizona State University School of Criminology
and Criminal Justice

Sonali Rajan, EdD, MS
Assistant Professor of Health Education
Teachers College, Columbia University

Jeffrey Swanson, MA, PhD
Professor, Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
Duke University School of Medicine
Consortium for Risk Based Firearm Policy

Daniel Webster, ScD, MPH
Professor
Johns Hopkins University
Consortium for Risk Based Firearm Policy

Garen Wintemute, MD, MPH
Director, Violence Prevention Research Program
University of California, Davis
Consortium for Risk Based Firearm Policy

Stephen N. Xenakis, MD
Brigadier General (Ret), U.S. Army
Uniformed Services University of
Health Sciences
Consortium for Risk Based Firearm Policy

Tracy Witte, PhD
Associate Professor
Auburn University

April M. Zeoli, PhD, MPH
Associate Professor
Michigan State University
Consortium for Risk Based Firearm Policy