

**The Graduate Student Assembly  
The University of Texas at Austin**

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**Resolution:** G.R. 18 (S) 6 – In Response to Proposed Federal and State Policies on Gun Violence Prevention

**Summary:** In reaction to gun violence, particularly in response to mass shootings at schools, different federal and state policies regulating firearms have been proposed or considered. One bill would restrict semi-automatic weapons from being available to the public. Other bills call for higher restrictions on gun ownership. Some bills from previous years that loosen restrictions are still being considered. Some states are considering arming teachers. Finally, “Red Flag Laws” are ways in which statements and behavior from at-risk individuals can be used as a way for court injunctions to temporarily remove the person’s guns. The GSA supports federal and state action that prevents gun violence.

**WHEREAS (1):** In the United States, as of March 14th, there have been 10,883 incidents of gun violence so far in 2018, with 2,862 total people killed and more than 673 children and teens killed or injured.<sup>1</sup> Of these incidents, 37 have been mass shootings.<sup>2</sup> Twelve incidents have been school shootings where at least one victim was shot<sup>3</sup>; and,

**WHEREAS (2):** Four of the five deadliest mass shootings in the history of the United States have involved legally purchased semi-automatic assault weapons, including the 2017 Harvest Music Festival shooting in Las Vegas (58 killed, 500+ injured),<sup>4</sup> the 2016 Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida (49 killed, 50+ injured),<sup>5</sup> the 2012 Sandy Hook

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<sup>1</sup> “Gun Violence Archive 2018.” Accessed March 14, 2018. <http://www.gunviolencearchive.org>

<sup>2</sup> Mass shootings are defined as when at least four victims are injured or killed. See: “Mass Shootings.” Gun Violence Archive. Accessed March 3, 2018. <http://www.gunviolencearchive.org/mass-shooting>

<sup>3</sup> Simon, Darran. “Nine weeks into the year and there have already been 12 school shootings.” Cnn.com. March 2, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/02/us/school-shootings-2018-list-trnd/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> Horton, Alex. “The Las Vegas shooter modified a dozen rifles to shoot like automatic weapons.” The Washington Post. Oct 3, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/10/02/video-from-las-vegas-suggests-automatic-gunfire-heres-what-makes-machine-guns-different/?utm\\_term=.db016257d2c1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/10/02/video-from-las-vegas-suggests-automatic-gunfire-heres-what-makes-machine-guns-different/?utm_term=.db016257d2c1)

<sup>5</sup> Jansen, Bart. “Weapons gunman used in Orlando shooting are high capacity, common.” USA today. June 14, 2016. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/06/14/guns-used-kill-49-orlando-high-capacity-common-weapons/85887260/>

Elementary School shooting (27 dead, 20 of them children, 2 injured),<sup>6</sup> and the 2017 shooting in Sutherland Springs, Texas (25 dead, 20 injured).<sup>7</sup> The remaining event was the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007, involving one legal weapon purchase and one pistol illegally bought from an out-of-state dealer (32 dead, 17 injured)<sup>8</sup>; and,

**WHEREAS (3):** A school shooting with an assault weapon on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018, in Parkland, Florida, resulted in the deaths of 17 students and adults, with 14 injured. In response, the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School have initiated a national conversation regarding gun policy in the United States, including the planning of the upcoming March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018 national demonstration titled “March for Our Lives”<sup>9</sup>; and,

**WHEREAS (4):** Members of Congress in the United States Senate and House of Representatives have produced a number of statements and bills intended to reform gun policy in the U.S.; and,

**WHEREAS (5):** U.S. Representative Cicilline (D-Rhode Island) has put forward H.R. 5087, an Assault Weapons Ban, which will prohibit the sale, transfer, production, and importation of semi-automatic rifles and pistols with military-style features of detachable magazines, fixed magazines that can hold more than 10 rounds, and any semi-automatic shotgun outside of law enforcement.<sup>10</sup> This renews the 1994 assault weapons ban which expired without renewal in 2004; and,

**WHEREAS (6):** The Florida State Legislature passed legislation on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018, which included language on a program allowing school teachers to carry firearms on school property and while working.<sup>11</sup> Several states have already had this policy, such as in Texas, where 172 districts out of 1,023 have allowed teachers to carry a gun for years, although it is unknown how many teachers participate in the program.<sup>12</sup> Many arguments have been made against these measures, citing risks, insufficient training, and the cost of

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<sup>6</sup> “Connecticut Shootings Fast Facts.” Cnn.com. Updated December 7, 2017.

<https://www.cnn.com/2013/06/07/us/connecticut-shootings-fast-facts/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> “Deadliest Mass Shootings in Modern US History Fast Facts.” Cnn.com. Updated March 3, 2018.

<https://www.cnn.com/2013/09/16/us/20-deadliest-mass-shootings-in-u-s-history-fast-facts/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> Yan, Holly, Stapleton, AnneClaire, and Simon, Darran. “Authorities: Texas church shooter had three gunshot wounds.” Cnn.com. Nov 7, 2017. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/06/us/texas-church-shooting/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> Schouten, Fredreka, and Gaudiano, Nicole. “Gun-control groups team with students to turn Parkland shooting anguish into activism.” USA Today. Feb 28, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> “Cicilline Introduces Assault Weapons Ban of 2018.” House.gov. Press Release. Feb 26, 2018.

<https://cicilline.house.gov/press-release/cicilline-introduces-assault-weapons-ban-2018>

<sup>11</sup> Astor, Maggie. “Florida Gun Bill: What’s In It and What Isn’t.” New York Times. Mar 8, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/08/us/florida-gun-bill.html>

<sup>12</sup> Chang, Julie. “Texas teachers, officers buck Trump’s idea to arm teachers with guns.” MyStatesman. Feb 23, 2018. <https://www.mystatesman.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/texas-teachers-officers-buck-trump-idea-arm-teachers-with-guns/RsOzMoceUDwOR4T4IX1IMI/>

training and weapons when schools aren't funded for academic needs. On March 14, 2018, a teacher and reserve police officer teaching a lesson at a Northern California high school accidentally discharged his weapon and injured a student.<sup>13</sup> This has resulted in further backlash against the idea of teachers being armed in the classroom, as even a trained officer can cause an accident; and,

**WHEREAS (7):** Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich proposed the Background Check Expansion Act (S.2009) in 2017, which would require background checks for the sale or transfer of all firearms from one private party to another.<sup>14</sup> Currently, unlicensed or private sellers are not required to conduct a background check before selling a firearm, which accounts for up to 40% of all gun sales in the U.S. through gun shows, online purchases, and other sales<sup>15</sup>; and,

**WHEREAS (8):** Other Congressional bills allowing for weaker gun control laws have also been proposed. The "Hearing Protection Act of 2017," proposed by Jeff Duncan (R-South Carolina) allows for the easier purchase of silencers and was put within the Sportsmen's Heritage and Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) Act, which included other controversial firearms policies. The SHARE Act was stalled twice after a shooting in June, 2017, and then after the Las Vegas Shooting of October 2017.<sup>16</sup> Critics cite that silencers could make it more difficult to identify the location origin of gunshots for both victims and police during a mass shooting<sup>17</sup>; and,

**WHEREAS (9):** Some state officials have called for a mentally ill patient registry and the prevention of all mentally ill people from purchasing guns.<sup>18</sup> The issue of mental health in the subject of gun control is complicated because of a number of pervasive misconceptions linking mental illness to violent behavior. According to the American Psychiatric Association, less than 1% of mass shootings are perpetrated by offenders with serious mental illnesses, with less than 3% involved in all gun violence.<sup>19</sup> Calls for the

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<sup>13</sup> Chavez, N., & Mossburg, C. "Teacher accidentally fires gun and injures student." CNN.com. March 14, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/14/us/california-teacher-fires-gun/index.html>

<sup>14</sup> "Senators Introduce Background Check Expansion Act to Reduce Gun Violence." October 26, 2017. Press release. <https://www.tomudall.senate.gov/news/press-releases/senators-introduce-background-check-expansion-act-to-reduce-gun-violence>

<sup>15</sup> "H.R. 3411 and Brady Bill 2.0 Fact Sheet." Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. <http://www.bradiycampaign.org/hr-3411-brady-bill-20-fact-sheet>

<sup>16</sup> Bresnahan, John, Caygle, Heather, and Everett, Burgess. "Massacre blunts momentum of gun silencer bill." Politico.com. Oct 2, 2017. <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/10/02/congress-gun-silencer-bill-las-vegas-243366>

<sup>17</sup> Wheeler, Lydia. "Five things to know about the GOP Gun-suppressor law." The Hill. Oct 8, 2017. <http://thehill.com/regulation/legislation/354251-five-things-to-know-about-gops-gun-suppressor-bill>

<sup>18</sup> Mueller, Benjamin. "Limiting Access to Guns for Mentally ill is Complicated." The New York Times. Feb 15, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/15/us/gun-access-mentally-ill.html>

<sup>19</sup> Knoll, John L. IV, and Annas, George D. "Mass Shootings and Mental Illness." Psychiatry Online. 2016. <https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/pdf/10.5555/appi.books.9781615371099>

mentally ill to not have access to firearms are considered implausible, ineffective, and unconstitutional; and,

**WHEREAS (10):** Five states have enacted “Red Flag Laws” or “Extreme Risk Protection Orders” that allow for family members or law enforcement officers to petition courts to temporarily take guns from people who pose a danger to themselves or others.<sup>20</sup> Eighteen states are considering adopting these laws. These measures are argued to be far more effective at preventing gun violence because they focus on immediate intervention regarding dangerous behavior, not mental health diagnoses; and,

**WHEREAS (11):** Texas has a state law allowing for guns to be taken from mental health patients deemed dangerous, but no “Red Flag Law” to allow law enforcement officers to intercede based on statements and actions of persons at risk to themselves and others without requiring a medical diagnosis<sup>21</sup>; and,

**WHEREAS (12):** Research from the Justice Department and other sources highlight that the total number of school shootings and overall crime rates have decreased since the 1990s, with four times fewer children killed in schools.<sup>22</sup> But, the shootings are getting deadlier, with few studies to understand broad or specific causes and even fewer changes actually implemented.<sup>23</sup> Comprehensive policy reforms and cultural shifts are needed to address serious problems of gun violence in schools and throughout the country; now,

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT (1):** The Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) of the University of Texas at Austin calls upon state and federal legislators to develop policies regarding the reasonable accessibility and possession of firearms towards reducing gun violence; and,

**THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (2):** The GSA supports the organizing actions of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students which facilitate national discussion and action on gun policy, including the March 24<sup>th</sup> “March for Our Lives”; and,

**THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (3):** The GSA supports the passage of the 2018 Assault Weapons Ban, H.R. 5087; and,

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<sup>20</sup> Mueller, Benjamin. “Limiting Access to Guns for Mentally ill is Complicated.” The New York Times. Feb 15, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/15/us/gun-access-mentally-ill.html>

<sup>21</sup> Johnson, Kirk. “States Mull ‘Red Flag’ Gun Seizures from People Deemed Dangerous.” The New York Times. Feb 23, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/23/us/red-flag-laws-guns.html>

<sup>22</sup> McMaken, Ryan. “There Are Fewer School Shootings Now Than During the 1990s.” The Mises Institute. March 1, 2018. <https://mises.org/wire/there-are-fewer-school-shootings-now-during-1990s>

<sup>23</sup> Duwe, Grant. “Mass shootings are getting deadlier, not more frequent.” Politico. Oct 4, 2017.

<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/10/04/mass-shootings-more-deadly-frequent-research-215678>

**THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (4):** The GSA does not support arming teachers in schools; and,

**THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (5):** The GSA opposes any instantiation of the 2017 Hearing Protection Act into any new legislation that would allow for the easier transfer and purchase of silencers; and,

**THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (6):** The GSA calls upon the State of Texas to pursue implementation of “Red Flag Laws” to legally allow law enforcement officials and family, friends, or coworkers to petition a court to temporarily take guns from people who are at risk of harming themselves and/or others based on their recent behavior; and,

**THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (7):** The GSA calls upon its members and the graduate students they represent to contact their state and federal elected officials in order to discuss and pass comprehensive gun policy reform; and,

**THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (8):** That copies of this resolution be delivered to the Office of the Chancellor, the Office of the President, the Office of Executive Vice President and Provost, the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School, the Office of the Dean of Students, the Office of the Vice President of Legal Affairs, Texas Senators Ted Cruz and John Cornyn, Texas Representatives of Austin Michael T. McCaul, Bill Flores, Lamar Smith, Roger Williams, John Carter, and Lloyd Dogget, the Texas State Legislature, *The Austin American-Statesman*, *The Texas Tribune*, and *The Daily Texan*.

**PASSED** by the GSA General Assembly, March 21, 2018

Signature of the GSA President  \_\_\_\_\_