

Remarks of Attorney General Maura Healey
White House Gun Violence Convening
May 24, 2016
As Prepared for Delivery

Good afternoon! It's such an honor to be here.

And it's particularly poignant to be here today. On Sunday, a Massachusetts police officer was brazenly shot and killed during a simple traffic stop, and a State Trooper was seriously injured. Similar acts of violence occurred in cities and towns across this country.

So thank you to President Obama, Vice President Biden, Valerie Jarrett, Jerry Abramson and the fantastic team in the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs – for making gun violence a priority for this administration and for bringing us together.

I also want to acknowledge my colleagues from Massachusetts: Boston Mayor Marty Walsh and Boston Police Commissioner Bill Evans, who have set such an example through their shared work and advocacy on this issue. And State Representatives David Linsky and Lori Ehrlich, who have made gun violence a legislative priority.

And thank you to my fellow Attorneys General who are here, for your leadership and partnership: AG Racine from Washington, D.C., and AG Frosh from Maryland. As Attorneys General, we have the tools to tackle this problem in unique ways.

Last month, I got to ditch these high heels for Converse high-tops at a basketball tournament and gun violence summit with middle school students from Boston.

We kicked off a program my office put together with the University of Massachusetts and the 3Point Foundation to help young people on the front lines of gun violence get support and create change in their communities.

At the end of the day, the kids all wrote me letters, telling me what they thought I could do to address the violence that plagues their neighborhoods.

And you know, kids don't sugarcoat it.

This is from Viktor, an eighth grader: "You are the Attorney General and you protect rights. Well one thing that hasn't been protected is our lives. The deaths in our city are overflowing."

Robert, a sixth grader, asked me to make sure there are no more (and I quote) “people laying face down on the ground” in his neighborhood.

But Vicktor, Robert, and their classmates weren’t just there to talk about the problem. They were there to talk about solutions. To show us the way.

Together, as state and local leaders, we all know we can do more. These kids’ suggestions are a reminder that we must do more.

Civil Investigations

“Go over there to the gun shops, and fix them.”

- Jay, Grade 6

Well, Jay, we’re working on it.

In December, our office sent a letter to every gun dealer in the state. We told them what our laws require and made very clear that we’d be watching.

We’ve followed up with investigations. We’re making sure dealers are conducting thorough background checks, doing the right recordkeeping, providing warnings and safety information, properly storing firearms, and not selling certain guns – like assault weapons and Glocks.

And where they’re not following the law, we’re taking legal action.

Criminal Trafficking

“Illegal gun transfers should be solved, with major consequences, because with more illegal guns comes more deaths and crime.”

- Mason

We couldn’t agree more, Mason.

And we have a team of investigators and prosecutors focused on stopping the illegal trafficking of guns, on our streets and across our borders.

They’re working closely with federal, state, and local partners, but also with law enforcement agencies in neighboring states.

That partnership is so important, because in Massachusetts, more than half of the guns seized in crime come from other states. Those of us in law enforcement need to pool resources and information so that we can trace every crime gun and stop illegal transfers at their source.

Education

“Get young kids together and educate them on the dangers of guns.”

- *Nahdia*

That was one of the goals of our summit. We’ll do more like it, and support the great organizations working to teach kids about guns and keep them away from guns.

Organizations like Operation LIPSTICK, which helps young women understand why they shouldn’t buy, hide, or hold guns for their boyfriends and brothers.

But it’s not just our young people who need to learn more.

In the last five months alone, 23 toddlers have fired a gun and shot themselves or someone else. Twenty-three toddlers!

Look, talking to toddlers isn’t going to help. But talking to their parents might!

We also need to talk about the issues of mental health and domestic violence that lead to so many gun-related injuries and deaths in this country.

Sixty percent of gun deaths every year are suicides. And if you’re a victim of domestic violence and there’s a gun in the house, you’re 500 percent more likely to be killed.

This is a public health issue, and those of us in law enforcement need to work closely with the public health community to address it.

Health care providers talk with patients and parents about alcohol and drug use, seat belts, putting up safety gates, and covering electrical outlets. Well, I think they should be asking about guns in the home – and issues of mental health in the home – too.

Guns are among the most dangerous products out there, yet some states are trying to prevent doctors from talking with their patients about them.

So our office is teaming up with the medical community. Last month, we launched a partnership with the Massachusetts Medical Society to create first-of-its-kind guidance for doctors on how to talk with patients about gun safety.

When we're done, providers will have information at their fingertips to counsel patients who have a gun – or are concerned about a gun – in their home.

As a law enforcement agency, we can also help educate people on how to respond to gun violence. It's deeply sad that we have to spend our time doing that, but we do.

For example, in the wake of the church massacre in Charleston, our office partnered with the Boston Police Department and the FBI to train church leaders on security and addressing active shooter scenarios.

Community Programming

“More summer programs and more jobs.”
- Thomas

While gun violence affects every community, it disproportionately affects poorer communities and communities of color. African Americans are nearly twice as likely to be killed by a gun as white people.

What can we do about that?

As Attorneys General, we can set money aside from forfeiture and lawsuits for community programming.

Last year, we took \$300,000 to fund summer jobs for more than 250 at-risk teenagers across Massachusetts. We'll be doing the same this summer.

It's just a start, and it's part of so much other work happening across our state.

By organizations like Mothers for Justice & Equality, which is organizing moms – including many who have lost a child – and giving them the tools they need to end cycles of violence in their communities, block by block, family to family.

I also want to give a special shout out to Mayor Walsh and Commissioner Evans for going all-in to tackle gun violence in Boston. They have partnered with clergy and community leaders to expand youth outreach programs, hold peace walks in neighborhoods affected by violence, and to get illegal guns off the street.

Laws & Regulations

“Make stricter gun laws to make sure only qualified people can have guns.”

- Hakeem

Massachusetts has some of the toughest gun laws in the country, and my office is dedicated to keeping them in place.

We’ve defended laws that prevent people with a felony, a firearms-related conviction, or a domestic violence conviction from getting a license to carry.

We’ve stood up for the right of police chiefs to determine whether someone in their community is fit to carry a gun.

And we’ve issued unique gun safety regulations under our consumer protection authority. They’re designed to make sure handguns sold in Massachusetts have childproofing and safety features, like heavier trigger pulls and load indicators.

Here’s why that’s important: because of our strong laws, Massachusetts consistently has one of the lowest per capita gun death rates in the country.

Advocacy

“We should speak up and support other people speaking up.”

- Dorian, 8th grade

Dorian’s right.

Earlier today, with 13 other Attorneys General from across the country, we sent a letter calling on Congress to end the ban on CDC funding for gun violence research.

Gun violence is a public health issue. We should let our public health experts study it!

It’s just one example of how we can speak up together and make our voices stronger. But there’s so more we can do to change the national conversation.

On issues like immunity for gun dealers and manufacturers. This is the only product of its kind for which Congress has given the industry extensive freedom from liability.

That's not right. The gun industry should be held to the same liability standards as the manufacturers and sellers of other consumer products.

Conclusion

One last letter, this one from Tyrone.

“Let's make people come together for more than just funerals.”

That's why we're here today. To talk about this issue that too often divides us – that challenges our values and sometimes our very faith in this country.

We've come together today in honor of the bible study group in Charleston;

The Marines gathered at the recruiting center in Chattanooga;

The beautiful first graders at Sandy Hook;

And the nearly 100,000 people in America who have been killed with a gun since that horrific day.

To share ideas and find solutions.

Let's keep coming together for more than just funerals!

Thank you.