

# A Letter to ‘Students Demand Action’ from a Gun Owner

Dear Students Demand Action,

I understand. You’ve witnessed — far too often at first hand and in the most terrifying circumstances — the violent deaths of your fellow students. You refuse to accept that that’s just how it has to be. You’re organizing for change. You deserve to be heard. Don’t let anyone talk down to you or minimize your concerns.

You want action. I don’t blame you. But it’s important to consider what kind of action you want, how to go about getting it, and what it will accomplish.

With respect to gun control laws, it’s worth considering how well those have worked in the past at preventing school shootings.

Article 18, Section 922 of the United States Code deems it “unlawful for any person to sell or otherwise dispose of any firearm or ammunition to any person knowing or having reasonable cause to believe that such person ... has been adjudicated as a mental defective or has been committed to any mental institution.”

Nikolas Cruz was, according to Florida’s Department of Children & Family Services (which had investigated prior violent incidents in which he was involved) “classified as a vulnerable adult due to mental illness.”

But he got a gun anyway.

Another part of that US Code section, usually referred to as the “Gun-Free School Zones Act,” deems it “unlawful for any individual knowingly to possess a firearm that has moved in or that otherwise affects interstate or foreign commerce at a place that the individual knows, or has reasonable cause to believe, is a school zone.”

But Nikolas Kruz came to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida with his rifle and killed 14 students and three staff members anyway.

Nikolas Cruz was, in theory, bound up in a web of laws intended to prevent him from getting a gun or using it to commit murder. Those laws didn’t stop him.

Starting with the National Firearms Act of 1934, the US government has, with increasing stringency, regulated the ownership, carriage and use of guns for nearly a century.

What have we learned?

Among other things, we’ve learned that these regulations don’t work, at least if the goal is

to reduce violence. Any list of the most dangerous cities in the United States will heavily overlap a list of the cities with the most draconian gun control laws.

The numbers are hard to pin down, but at a minimum there are more than 100 million gun owners, and more than 300 million guns, in America. The Gun Violence Archive claims 15,593 gun deaths in 2017. That's 15,593 too many. But it's also one death for every 6,400 gun owners and one for every 18,000 guns, and that includes police shootings, self-defense, and suicide.

I'm writing to you as one of more than 100 million American gun owners who has never entered a school with the intent to kill. We and our guns are clearly not the problem as such.

What is the problem? How to solve it? I wish you luck in doing a better job than your elders of figuring that out.