

DRAFT: Testimony of Lori Haas
DPCC Hearing on: "America Speaks Out: Protecting Our Children from Gun Violence."
March 7, 2018

Good afternoon. My name is Lori Haas and I live in Richmond, Virginia. On the morning of April 16th, 2007, I received a phone call from my then 19 year old daughter with the words that changed everything - "Hi Mommy, I've been shot" My daughter Emily, who suffered two graze wounds to her head, was one of only seven to survive in her classroom of 18 students. She kept local police on the line of a cell phone she kept hidden from the shooter during the entire ordeal, all the while playing dead as the shooter entered her room three times. Her bravery that morning, little known to the outside world, was commended by law enforcement for providing critical information to their response and she is a hero to them, to her family and to those who know her best.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is difficult for anyone, but for those with little life experiences, it can be brutal and confusing -- Can you imagine students returning to the scene of their attempted murder over and over and over again as they try to resume their lives, as Emily and the other injured students did at Va Tech ? Healing takes much time and PTSD can lurk beneath the surface and occasionally, even to this day, emerges when yet another mass shooting happens. Yet, it pales beyond description for the suffering of those families whose loved ones were killed by guns - please do not say they were lost. They were shot & killed - murdered really- by someone who should not have had a gun.

Regulation of firearms is desperately needed to determine who, how, when and where someone is allowed to own and carry a firearm in this country, and ignoring this need is

arming the very people who harm our families. We see this every day in communities across this country and most recently in Parkland, FL . The daily carnage of gun violence in too many communities – an epidemic that sadly, only sees attention when a mass shooting shines the spotlight on this issue - is fueled by the guns everywhere perspective of the gun lobby's immoral greed. It must stop!

The number one job of those elected to office is to keep citizens safe - and far too many of those elected have failed miserably at their job for far too long. They must be voted out of office and I predict many of them will lose in the coming local, state & federal election cycles. Voters are fed up and will make this issue – gun violence prevention – the litmus test for who gets their vote in the coming years. We've already seen this time and again in Virginia in recent cycles. Governor McAuliffe, Lt. Governor Northam & Attorney General Herring ran & won on guns statewide 2013 and it was no different this cycle. In November 2017, guns was cited as the #2 issue in exit polls when democrats again swept statewide office and picked up 17 seats in the House of Delegates in a blue wave. Candidates across Virginia embraced gun violence prevention, ignored the millions of dollars spent by the gun lobby here in 2017 and committed to saving lives. Governor Northam, Lt. Gov Justin Fairfax and AG Herring even appeared at a GVP rally in front of the NRA headquarters in Fairfax Va while on the campaign trail - they're all in office now. The power of the gun lobby is inflated when those running for office give credence to its influence.

Let's be clear, the NRA does not deserve a seat at the table when discussing solutions to gun violence - that's offensive to survivors everywhere. They do not have researchers,

educators, public health officials or law enforcement in their ranks – it's a lobbyist organization with the sole purpose of making as much money for themselves and the firearms industry as possible. As my friend Barbara Parker has said, our children should not be collateral damage for the profiteering of the gun lobby. And that is exactly what has happened in recent years - gun deaths (suicides & homicides) are on the increase and we must have elected officials who will stand firm and support policies intended to reduce gun violence in all its forms. A history of violence is the single biggest predictor of future violence, yet we allow the very persons committing violence to continue to be armed. There is no single policy – we need an array of approaches to begin to reduce this epidemic: prohibitions (permanent & temporary) on access to firearms by persons displaying violent behaviors or convicted of violent misdemeanors; trafficking laws to diminish the flow of illegal guns into impacted communities; a ban on and regulation of weapons of war; resources for communities disproportionately affected by gun violence; public health approaches that include permanent funding for the CDC; stripping liability protection for gun manufacturers and universal background checks as the foundation upon which all prohibitions can be enforced. It's far too late for too many families But we need these policies to protect our future. Please do all you can to make this happen.

Everyone - no matter who you are or where you live, pray, learn, shop or work – deserves freedom from gun violence.