

September 12, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate

Honorable Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
House of Representatives

Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
House of Representatives

**Re: The Need for Federal Government Investment in Non-Partisan Gun
Violence Research**

Dear Congressional Leaders,

We write as an informal group of former federal prosecutors and senior government officials to urge Congress to appropriate funding for vital research to examine the contributing factors and root causes of gun violence and how to effectively reduce such violence to make our schools, churches, public places, and country safer without infringing on Second Amendment rights. **As former law enforcement leaders we are painfully aware of the destructive impact of gun violence as many of us tried to help communities deal with the aftermath of mass shootings, homicides, and violent assaults with firearms.** In the wake of horrific mass shootings in Philadelphia, El Paso, Dayton, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Las Vegas, Santa Fe, Sutherland Springs, Parkland, Sandy Hook, Aurora, Columbine and all the other tragedies, the need for non-partisan, evidence-based, and data-driven research to guide policymaking on gun violence is critical. Gun violence is a serious problem, and it is a problem that is amenable to research-directed action.

As President Trump recently observed, “[i]n the two decades since Columbine, our nation has watched with rising horror and dread as one mass shooting has followed another—over and over again, decade after decade.” The President also acknowledged that he was “open and ready to listen and discuss all ideas that will actually work and make a very big difference.” A willingness “to listen and discuss all ideas” is important

but will continue to yield disappointment when there is such a dearth of meaningful, data-driven research on the root causes of gun violence. Despite being authorized by Congress since 1996, the federal government has virtually abandoned any funding for gun violence research. Not surprisingly, the issue of gun violence is now discussed through partisan political soundbites rather than evidence-based research and data-driven conclusions. Consequently, policymaking has become uneducated guesswork with disappointing, if not tragic, results.

Having gone decades without meaningful gun violence research, there is no question that a serious effort aimed at getting to the root causes of mass shootings and gun violence will provide the best opportunity to fashion effective solutions—policymaking backed by data and evidence. **By analogy, consider that in the 1970s our country was facing dramatic increases in road and traffic fatalities.** In response, Congress established the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, providing hundreds of millions of dollars for research into what could make cars, drivers, and roads safer. This research led to safety standards that have saved more than 600,000 lives over the last 40 years. In a sad irony, deaths from gun violence have surpassed traffic fatalities. According to the most recent available data, in 2017 there were roughly 37,133 traffic fatalities, compared to over 39,000 gun violence fatalities—two-thirds of which are suicides. Our history suggests that the model of conducting meaningful research and data analysis of a problem and then enacting responsive policies based upon the data, evidence, and conclusions of such research yields more effective results. There is not a more important issue to apply this model than the issue of gun violence. The time for meaningful, nonpartisan gun violence research is now.

Research is the key to identifying and developing policy solutions that reduce gun violence and protect individual liberties. Research is crucial to finding this middle ground. In addition, it is essential that gun policies and practices are backed up by a strong evidence base that demonstrates their effectiveness. Recently, Congress clarified in 2018 that the CDC could use its budget to conduct much needed gun violence research but has failed to appropriate any funding for such efforts. **In this Congress, the House Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittee has authorized \$50 million—\$25 million each to the CDC and NIH—to conduct gun violence research. However, there are other agencies such as the VA and NIJ/DOJ which could also meaningfully contribute to the landscape of data-driven research into the root causes of gun violence and help fashion effective solutions.**

As former leaders in the law enforcement community, it is imperative that the federal government fund a diverse portfolio of research including but not limited to the areas of mental health, suicide, intimate partner homicides, defensive gun use, enforcement of existing firearms laws, and police officer training and safety be included in the research in order to fashion effective national policy to decrease incidents of gun violence. In fact, high-quality research is needed to craft policies that could contribute to reducing gun injuries, deaths, and violence and research should be funded that meets the most rigorous standards of quality and transparency.

Few would argue there is a more pressing domestic issue than addressing gun violence in this country. This is an issue of national concern that all well-meaning people want to see resolved. The fact that gun violence has become politicized and divisive erodes our ability to preserve the safety of our communities. We call upon members of congress to come together and appropriate funds for gun research to examine the root causes of gun violence, provide evidence-based solutions, and identify what can effectively be done to make our schools, churches, public places, and country safer. We call on the Senate to match the resolve in the House and authorize no less than \$50 million for nonpartisan gun violence research and to examine the root causes and effects of gun violence using rigorous standards for scientific accuracy, quality and transparency.

As members of the law enforcement community we worked on the front lines of our criminal justice system and we support finding solutions based upon data-driven research and evidence-based analysis. We do not need knee-jerk legislative responses based upon political positioning rather than critical research and analysis—the stakes are too high to simply pass laws which are more effective at assuaging our need to do something rather than actually preventing gun violence.

For those of us who have served in law enforcement, our goal is to increase public safety. We cannot accomplish this if we do not have an accurate knowledge of the scope of the problem we face. The first step to preventing gun violence is to thoroughly understand the root causes of gun violence by conducting nonpartisan research. We ask that you dedicate the necessary resources for data-driven research and evidence-based analysis of the gun violence problem in this country.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully yours,

Michael Mukasey

Former Attorney General of the United States
Former District Court Judge, Southern District of New York

Brett L. Tolman

Former United States Attorney, District of Utah
Former member of the Attorney General's Advisory Committee
Former Assistant United States Attorney, District of Utah

Paul Cassell

Former Associate Deputy Attorney General, Department of Justice

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Former United States Attorney, Middle District of Tennessee
Former President (1983), Board Member and Former Chair, Criminal Court Committee

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Former United States Attorney, Southern District of Ohio
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Former United States District Judge, District of New Jersey
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