

October 11, 2017

Dr. Francis S. Collins
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Director Collins:

We are writing today to urge the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to renew a recently-lapsed funding opportunity for firearm violence research.

Gun Violence in the U.S. is “Underfunded and Understudied”

Every year, over 30,000 Americans die in gun-related fatalities.¹ In 2017 alone, over 11,900 people have died, and over 24,300 people have been injured, from gun violence. Our nation has experienced 278 mass shootings, including the horrific massacre in Las Vegas, and over 1,500 people have been injured by accidental shootings.² Gun-related fatalities have surpassed motor vehicle deaths in 21 states³, and the American Medical Association has described gun violence in America as a ““public health crisis” requiring a comprehensive public health response and solution.”⁴

In spite of the toll of gun violence on Americans’ health and safety, a dearth of scientific research has hindered efforts to reduce gun-related fatalities and injuries. The Dickey Amendment, which has been largely interpreted as a congressional ban on federal funding for gun research at CDC, has played a large role in perpetuating the gun violence research gap.⁵ The

¹ David E. Stark and Nigam H. Shah, “Funding and Publication of Research on Gun Violence and Other Leading Causes of Death,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* (January 3, 2017) (online at <http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2595514>).

² Gun Violence Archive, “Gun Violence Archive 2017” (accessed October 10, 2017) (online at <http://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>). *Note:* The Gun Violence Archive compiles data on gun violence by using “automated queries, manual research through over 2,000 media sources, aggregates, police blotters, police media outlets and other sources daily.” The Gun Violence Archive data cited above may differ from CDC data, which relies on death certificates to track gun deaths. Furthermore, the Gun Violence Archive numbers cited above do not include data on suicides. For additional information, please see the “General Methodology” section at www.gunviolencearchive.org/methodology.

³ Adrienne LaFrance, “Gun Deaths May Not Eclipse Traffic Fatalities Just Yet,” *The Atlantic* (February 8, 2016) (online at <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/02/guns-cars/460431/>).

⁴ American Medical Association, “AMA Calls Gun Violence ‘A Public Health Crisis,’” (June 14, 2016) (online at <https://www.ama-assn.org/ama-calls-gun-violence-public-health-crisis>).

⁵ Charles C. Branas, Andrew Flesher, Margaret K. Formica, et al, “Academic Public Health and the Firearm Crisis: An Agenda for Action,” *American Journal of Public Health* (February 8, 2017) (online at <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303619>); Bryan Schatz, “Congress Gutted Researchers’ Ability to Study Gun Violence. Now They’re Fighting Back,” *Mother Jones* (January 20, 2017) (online at <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2017/01/gun-violence-research-public-health/>).

Dickey Amendment only prohibits research “to advocate or promote gun control”—not objective scientific inquiries into gun violence prevention⁶—yet it has had a chilling effect on gun-related studies. When compared to other leading causes of death, gun violence is “substantially underfunded and understudied...based on mortality rates for each cause.”⁷

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, Gun Violence Research is in the “Sweet Spot” of NIH’s Efforts to “Save Lives”

Following the shooting of 20 children and 6 adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012,⁸ President Obama directed the Department of Health and Human Services to “conduct or sponsor research into the causes of gun violence and the ways to prevent it.”⁹ In response, the NIH issued a new funding opportunity for “Research on the Health Determinants and Consequences of Violence and its Prevention, Particularly Firearm Violence.” The funding opportunity supported research at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), among other segments of NIH.¹⁰

During a 2015 hearing on mental health challenges in the U.S., Dr. Thomas Insel, the then-Director of the NIMH, touted the funding opportunity as a critical piece of the NIH’s efforts to “understand how science can save lives.”¹¹ Discussing projects to “assess risk for someone when they have made a suicide attempt” and to develop an understanding of “developmental pathways of violence,” Dr. Insel described the funding opportunity as “in the sweet spot” of the NIH’s mission to promote and improve health.¹²

Renewal of the Funding Opportunity Is Critical to Our Nation’s Efforts to Combat Gun Violence

Researchers agreed that the funding opportunity was essential to combatting the public health ramifications of gun violence. According to one clinical psychologist, the funding opportunity was “mission critical to bringing me into a new area [of gun research].”¹³ Another argued that “[i]t would have been much harder...to get funding for [gun] research without that

⁶ Rita Rubin, “Tale of 2 Agencies: CDC Avoids Gun Violence Research But NIH Funds It,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* (April 26, 2016) (online at <http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2513131>).

⁷ David E. Stark and Nigam H. Shah, “Funding and Publication of Research on Gun Violence and Other Leading Causes of Death,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* (January 3, 2017) (online at <http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2595514#jld160037f1>).

⁸ “Connecticut Shootings Fast Facts,” *CNN* (last updated October 5, 2017) (online at <http://www.cnn.com/2013/06/07/us/connecticut-shootings-fast-facts/index.html>).

⁹ President Barack Obama, *Presidential Memorandum—Engaging in Public Health Research on the Causes and Prevention of Gun Violence* (January 16, 2013) (online at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/16/presidential-memorandum-engaging-public-health-research-causes-and-preve>).

¹⁰ Department of Health and Human Services, “Research on the Health Determinants and Consequences of Violence and its Prevention, Particularly Firearm Violence (R21)” (issued September 23, 2013) (online at <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-13-369.html>).

¹¹ Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, “Mental Health Challenges,” *C-SPAN* (October 29, 2015) (online at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?329024-1/hearing-mental-health-challenges-us&start=4509>).

¹² Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, “Mental Health Challenges,” *C-SPAN* (October 29, 2015) (online at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?329024-1/hearing-mental-health-challenges-us&start=4509>).

specific program announcement on firearm violence.”¹³ Ultimately, from 2014 to 2017, the NIH provided \$18 million to 22 projects studying gun violence.¹⁴ The funding opportunity closed on January 8, 2017. Numerous public health experts have urged the NIH to renew the program.¹⁵

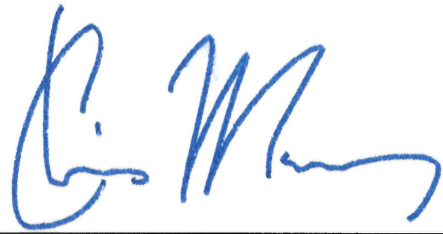
Given Dr. Insel’s promotion of the gun violence funding opportunity as in the “sweet spot” of the NIH’s efforts to “save lives” – and the devastating impact of gun violence across the country – we were surprised by recent reports that the NIH may not renew the program. According to *Science* magazine, renewal of the funding opportunity is “under consideration.” The NIH is “evaluating the current program’s outcomes and has no timeline [set] for a decision on its renewal.”¹⁶

Thanks in part to NIH-funded projects, the average American’s life expectancy increased by eight years between 1970 and 2013; heart disease deaths fell by 67.5% from 1969 to 2013; and cancer deaths decreased by 15% from 2003 to 2012.¹⁷ With 93 Americans dying *per day* from gun-related fatalities, it is critical that NIH dedicate a portion of its resources to the public health consequences of gun violence. We strongly urge you to renew the gun violence research program as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



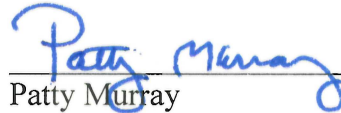
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Christopher Murphy
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator

¹³ Meredith Wadman, “NIH quietly shelves gun research program,” *Science* (September 13, 2017) (online at <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/09/nih-quietly-shelves-gun-research-program>).

¹⁴ Meredith Wadman, “NIH quietly shelves gun research program,” *Science Magazine* (September 13, 2017) (online at <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/09/nih-quietly-shelves-gun-research-program>).


¹⁵ Department of Health and Human Services, “Research on the Health Determinants and Consequences of Violence and its Prevention, Particularly Firearm Violence (R21)” (issued September 23, 2013) (online at <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-13-369.html>).

¹⁶ Meredith Wadman, “NIH quietly shelves gun research program,” *Science Magazine* (September 13, 2017) (online at <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/09/nih-quietly-shelves-gun-research-program>).

¹⁷ National Institutes of Health, “NIH: Turning Discovery Into Health—Our Health” (online at <https://www.nih.gov/sites/default/files/about-nih/impact/impact-our-health.pdf>).



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator



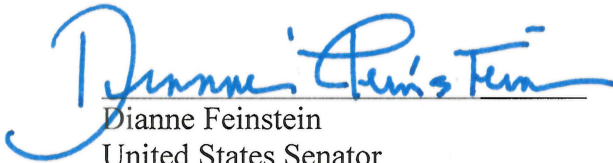
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



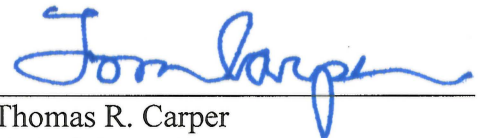
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



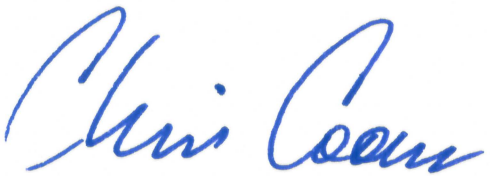
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



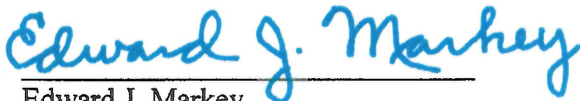
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



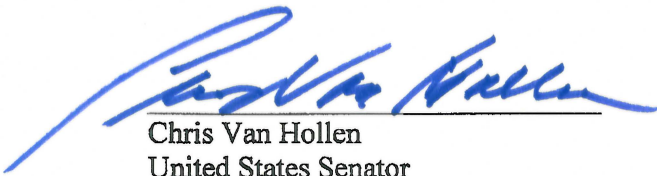
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



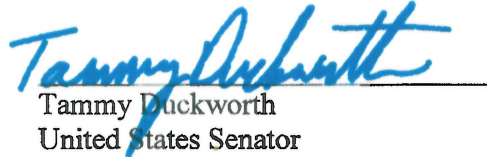
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



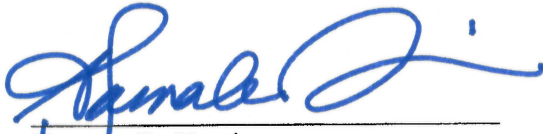
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



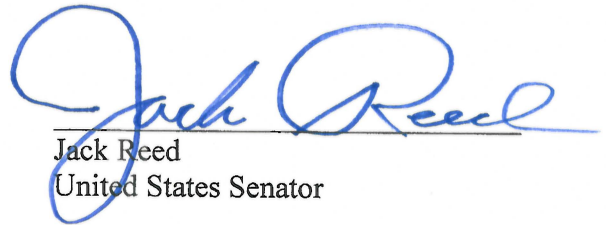
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator