

February 5, 2016

Senator Lois Wolk
State Capitol, Room 5114
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Wolk:

Thank you for introducing a bill entitled California Firearm Violence Research Act. Firearm violence is a major health and safety problem in the United States, and far too little is known about its causes, consequences, and prevention. We are writing to express our strong support for this bill, which we believe would help provide much-needed scientific evidence on which to base effective prevention efforts.

We join in our support for this measure as a result of our unique involvement in the history of public funding for research on firearm violence. We have written recently about that history and its consequences for the *Washington Post* (1), and we excerpt that article here.

Twenty years ago, one of us was director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, supporting research to build an evidence base to advance the science of gun-violence prevention. The other of us was a Republican representative from Arkansas determined to dismantle that effort because conservatives had concluded that it was aimed at gun control and not gun violence.

Ultimately, the House of Representatives voted to insert language into the CDC's appropriations bill that succeeded in prompting the CDC to bring gun-violence research to a halt. The law stated that no CDC funds "may be used to advocate or promote gun control." One of us subsequently was fired because of his commitment to gun-violence prevention research. The other saw the CDC's abandonment of its commitment to this research as a successful effort to protect the Second Amendment right to bear arms.

When we met, at a congressional appropriations hearing in 1996, we fiercely opposed each other's positions. But over years of communicating, we came to see that, while we had differences, we also shared values. We became colleagues, and we became friends. We have argued with each other and learned much from each other. We both belong to the National Rifle Association, and we both believe in the Second Amendment.

We have also come to see that gun-violence research can be created, organized and conducted with two objectives: first, to preserve the rights of law-abiding citizens and legal gun owners and, second, to make our homes and communities safer. Well-structured research can be conducted to develop technologies and identify ways to achieve both objectives. We can get there only through research.

Our nation does not have to choose between reducing gun-violence injuries and safeguarding gun ownership. Indeed, scientific research helped reduce the motor vehicle death rate in the United States and save hundreds of thousands of lives — all without getting rid of cars. For example, research led to the development of simple four-foot barricades dividing oncoming traffic that are preventing injuries and saving many lives. We can do the same with respect to firearm-related deaths, reducing their numbers while preserving the rights of gun owners.

We believe strongly that funding for research into gun-violence prevention should be dramatically increased. While our own efforts have been focused at the federal level, we recognize and wholeheartedly support leadership and action by the states, as exemplified by the bill to establish a UC Firearm Violence Research Center. We think it is critically important that two goals of the research be made explicit at the outset and be embedded in the legislation. One goal must be to protect the Second-Amendment rights of law-abiding gun owners; the other goal, to reduce gun violence. We also think it is important that research proposals be reviewed by a panel of highly qualified scientists, i.e. be peer reviewed by a broad and balanced panel, to make sure that it is well-designed and scientifically sound. The portfolio of completed research projects should also be reviewed periodically to make sure it is balanced and addresses both research goals.

States can serve as democracy's laboratories for firearm violence prevention research, as they do for other major health and social problems. This is particularly true for California, where well-qualified researchers already work with uniquely rich and valuable data on research that simply cannot be done elsewhere.

As one of us wrote elsewhere recently, doing nothing is no longer an acceptable solution. Thank you again for your leadership on this important issue. It is a pleasure to offer our support.

Sincerely,

The Honorable Jay Dickey
United States House of Representatives (Retired)

Mark Rosenberg, MD, MPP
Chief Executive Officer
The Task Force for Global Health

1. Dickey J, Rosenberg M. How to protect gun rights while reducing the toll of gun violence. *Washington Post*. December 25, 2015. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/time-for-collaboration-on-gun-research/2015/12/25/f989cd1a-a819-11e5-bff5-905b92f5f94b_story.html.