



UULMNJ Policy Brief: Gun Violence Prevention

Position: The 21 Unitarian Universalist congregations of New Jersey call upon our elected officials to act in the common good to improve public safety and save innocent lives by passing legislation to prevent gun violence. We mobilize at this time in our nation when the increasing tide of the blood of our citizens, gunned down while pursuing their ordinary lives, has reached an intolerable point. Our shared grief and moral outrage impel us to stand up and demand that the rights of the majority to life outweigh the overly influential interests of the few who benefit from the gun industry and their lobbyists. As Unitarian Universalists, we take as our first principle the inherent worth and dignity of each individual. Embedded in the Jewish, Christian and other religious and spiritual traditions, we hold life to be sacred and we are exhorted to love our neighbors as ourselves. We, therefore, feel the loss of each of these lives lost to gun violence as a rent in the fabric of our communal life and reverberate with the pain which ripples out through immediate families to the wider community and down through the generations.

Basis of our Position

We take this stand at this time in recognition that the Newtown massacre of 20 children and their school personnel is only the latest and most horrific of a long list of tragic mass murders. We take this stand in recognition that more than 30 people per day are murdered in this country and that over 30,000 die each year from firearm related deaths. We take this stand in recognition that the rate of firearm deaths in the US far exceeds all other advanced, affluent nations with a rate 20 times higher than the 22 other countries in this category, numbering 80% of all firearm deaths among this combined population. We take this stand in recognition that gun violence prevention laws are demonstrably effective because states with the tightest gun restrictions have the lowest gun death rates and that, conversely, states with the most lax gun restrictions have the highest gun death rates.

We take this stand in the full belief that sensible gun violence prevention measures are consistent with the Second Amendment of our Constitution. We recognize that many Americans use firearms for legitimate reasons, including hunting, target shooting, and self-protection. Many firearms, however, have no legitimate use outside the military. There are also many locations where possession of firearms is inappropriate, such as schools and churches and that permission to carry firearms in public needs to be tightly controlled. Finally, while most adults should be able to own firearms, individuals who have been determined to have committed illegal acts of violence or have a history of dangerous mental illness cannot possess firearms without creating unjustified risks to the safety of others. Even legitimate firearms may pose an unwarranted danger to innocent people when they are stored or transported inappropriately. We also believe that firearms should be legally required to be manufactured in a manner that reduces their potential for harm. We take note of the fact that recent polling shows that the majority of gun owners support common sense regulation of guns, as they recognize that their rights to own guns for self-protection and sport are not interfered with by such regulations. For our social contract as members of this society to succeed, we must balance rights with responsibilities. As citizens, we affirm this understanding daily by abiding by laws regarding automobile safety, as well as laws that regulate business practices, food and drug safety, and other such measures that contribute to public well being.

Our pursuit of life, liberty and happiness often depends on limiting the untrammelled rights of others to harm us.

Legislative Priorities

Therefore, the Unitarian Universalist congregations of New Jersey will actively advocate for those measures on a state and national level that will reduce the likelihood of gun violence. Among the measures that Unitarian Universalists will support and work to enact are:

- Prohibition of the manufacture or possession of assault rifles, semi-automatic firearms, and other forms of firearms and ammunition for which there is no legitimate civilian purpose.
- Registration of each gun to its owner, as with automobiles, and putting serial numbers on ammunition so that the purchaser can be traced.
- Tight restrictions on the ability of individuals to carry firearms in public and prohibit the possession of firearms in inappropriate locations.
- Requirements that firearm manufactures install trigger guards and other appropriate devices to reduce the risk of harm.
- Requirements that firearm owners store and transport their guns in a safe manner.

Further, we support the intention of the Obama administration to seek a fast track for federal legislation whose purpose is to reduce access to firearms for those who have lost that right and to eliminate from our midst those weapons that have no purpose in self-protection and sport but whose only purpose is to kill many people quickly with the most amount of harm.

Therefore we call upon our US Senators and Congressional Representatives to enact legislation that:

- 1) Requires universal background checks on all gun purchases, thus significantly reducing access to weapons by criminals, substance abusers, domestic violence batterers, and those with dangerous mental illness.
- 2) Bans military style assault weapons and high capacity magazines carrying more than 10 rounds.
- 3) Criminalizes gun trafficking and provides appropriate law enforcement penalties and resources to eliminate this practice.

We also stand in support of President Obama's executive actions to bolster the law enforcement response to gun violence as well as directives to the medical and mental health communities to identify the causes of and preventive practices for such violence.

Towards these ends, the Unitarian Universalists congregations of New Jersey will take whatever actions are appropriate to communicating our beliefs and effecting these positive changes in our society.