

Ryan Servaites, March For Our Lives Co-Founder & Policy Fellow
House Judiciary Committee Hearing
Protecting America from Assault Weapons
September 25th, 2019

February 14th, 2:21 P.M. 2:21 P.M. is the official time that the Broward County Police Department says a shooter entered the freshman building of my high school, Marjory Stoneman Douglas. About 7 minutes later, at 2:28 P.M, the shooter had left the building, and with it, he left 17 of my classmates and teachers lying dead in the halls and classrooms that they used to call home. 17 innocent souls. 14 Teenagers. And 17 more injured, some not sure if they would survive the horrific wounds that they had sustained. That was my freshman year of highschool. I was barely 15 years old. And I walked out of school that day not knowing how many classmates had lost their lives. Not knowing that 17 families would never see their loved ones again, that they would never be able to give them one last hug, one last kiss, one last embrace before they were taken away. That night, I slept with my door open, and although at the time I probably wouldn't have wanted to admit it, I was terrified. 7 minutes. 7 minutes is all it took for a shooter to end 17 lives. 7 minutes is all it took to injure 17 high school students and to traumatize an entire city.

Think about that for one second. 17 people injured, and 17 people left dead in 7 minutes. How in the world did a shooter inflict so much damage in so little time? He used an AR-15 style assault rifle, the weapon of choice for those who commit heinous crimes similar to the horrific events that happened at my school. The AR-15, and weapons like it, have been used in the deadliest mass shootings in American history, from the Pulse nightclub shooting, a horrendous

act of hate that left 49 dead, to the Las Vegas shooting, which took 58 lives, to the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting, which took 27 lives, mostly young children (Appendix A).

Gun violence is a complicated and multifaceted epidemic. Yet the magnitude of this epidemic is undeniably in part a result of the capacity for death that these assault weapons have. According to Bushmaster's own user manual, an AR-15 can fire off 45 rounds per minute. In the wrong hands, that is a potential 45 lives gone, 45 families destroyed, and entire communities with broken hearts, all in the span of 60 seconds. This is a weapon with a maximum effective range of 600 meters that has the ability to not just pierce tissue, but to shatter bone, to tear massive gaping holes in the flesh of innocent civilians just going about their daily lives, and as a result, to tear similarly gaping holes into the hearts of communities and families across the country. I fully understand the desire to keep oneself and one's family safe; in fact, I sympathize with it quite a lot. But if shattering bones and causing organs to explode doesn't seem excessive, then I don't know what could.

Whenever someone falls victim to gun violence, entire communities suffer, and friends and families learn a pain that no one should ever have to learn. Assault weapons have the capacity to inflict this pain on a mass scale. Just imagine it for one second. Put yourself in the shoes of a parent, sibling, or friend who just found out that they had lost a loved one forever, that a person who filled them with joy and happiness is now gone. How would you feel? What would you do? Imagine finding out that your child will never come back home from school or from going out with their friends. What would you do to save your child? What lengths would you go to, with the power that you have, that the people of this country have trusted you with, in order to make sure that no one would ever have to feel the pain of losing someone that means so much to

you? This is a pain that too many Americans, too many human beings experience every single day. You have the power to at least say that you tried, that you struggled, that you pushed and fought tooth and nail in the name of all of those victims, families, and communities.

These are weapons of war. These are weapons of hate. These are weapons of terror. And pretending that there is no legislative route to trying to stop, or at least reduce, the damage from these mass shootings isn't just irresponsible, it's unacceptable. That is why we at March For Our Lives unequivocally support H.R. 1296 The Assault Weapons Ban of 2019.

I was in my Spanish class when the fire alarm went off on February 14th. I walked out of the school with my class, like it was any other fire drill, yet before I knew it, I was huddled down under a seat in our school auditorium, texting my parents goodbye, telling them I loved them. Looking around at the faces of the crouching children beside me, not knowing if these would be the last people I would ever interact with. Not knowing if I would be able to go home and hug my parents and my siblings, and tell them that I loved them, that I was happy to see them, that everything would be okay. I was lucky. 17 others were not. The rest of that year, because we lost a building full of classrooms, I had to spend every other day back in that auditorium, back in that place that I was terrified would be the last place I would ever see. I'm not just asking for change, I'm begging for it. Begging, because I don't want to live in a country where every other day I read about another community destroyed, another group of innocent lives ripped away from us. As Americans we owe it ourselves to do better. And we can.

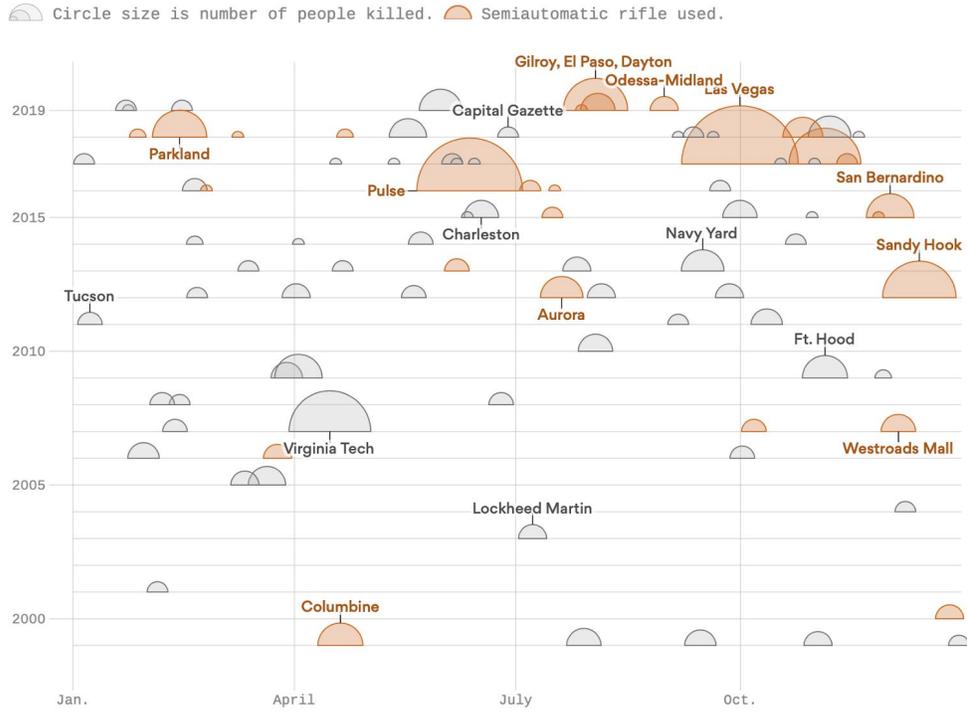
H.R. 1296 is a first step, and although I cannot say for sure that it would have prevented what happened at my school, it definitely would have helped mitigate the damage. Saving lives should be the top priority of this Congress and this Committee who are tasked with protecting the

safety of the American people. We deserve action from a Congress that so far has shown itself to be complacent in these acts of horror, and in this case, change is knocking at your door.

As a young activist, I am proud to say that I am part of a generation committed to change, focused on action, that cares about each other so much that we are willing to demonstrate and advocate on behalf of the experiences and trauma of one another. We've done our part. We've done the research, we've put in the work, we've organized, advocated, protested for the vision of a world where we are not afraid to go to school or to spend time with friends. We've proposed our Peace Plan For a Safer America, our comprehensive bold national approach to our nation's gun violence epidemic, crafted around this vision of what our world could, and should, be. It's a vision of the world where we can feel safe, where we can feel and be secure, as is our right. A world where 16 year olds like me don't have to help comfort a friend because of a loud noise, a world where kids can be kids and not have to think about, much less prepare for, a potential mass shooting. To see a friend break down because of a fire alarm going off, to see an entire cafeteria full of people suddenly freeze up in anxious fear in response to a loud noise; these are traumas that no one should have to live through. Yet every day that we don't do something about this issue is another day that breeds more trauma, pain, and loss. These are not just assault weapons. They are family destroyers. They are child killers. They are the medium by which trauma spreads like wildfire throughout our nation of terrified worshippers, of anxious school children, of people absolutely on edge, as a result of living their lives. Not a single 14-year-old should spend their final moments staring down the barrel of a machine that won't just take away their life, but that will do so in a horrendous and vicious way. These are horrific, gruesome weapons that have the ability to inflict pain with a magnitude far too large for comfort. This is our

moment. This is our moment, as a nation, that we say enough is enough, and that we decide that giving a single individual the ability to take away the lives of 17 others in the span of a few minutes absolutely absurd. The people of America are dying. The children of America are dying. My classmates are already dead. It's about time we do something about it.

Appendix A:



Data: [U.S. Mass Shootings, 1982-2019: Data From Mother Jones' Investigation](#); Chart: Chris Canipe/Axios

Appendix B:

Variable	Mass shooting deaths	Mass shooting injuries
State assault weapons ban	-0.59202 (-2.28)**	0.298 (1.16)
Federal assault weapons ban	-1.079 (-7.04)***	-1.733 (-10.10)***
Proportion of population that is black	65.66 (5.33)***	87.05 (6.20)***
Population density	-0.0177 (-2.73)***	-0.0542 (-7.18)***
Real per capita median income	0.000029 (0.48)	0.00021 (3.53)***
Proportion of population with college degree	1.66 (0.70)	-4.72 (-2.21)**
Unemployment rate	-0.0698 (-0.02)	-3.51 (-1.06)
Proportion of population >18 and <25	-55.21 (-5.94)***	-84.27 (-7.81)***
Proportion of population >24 and <35	-39.20 (-5.09)***	-20.59 (-2.65)***
Per capita prison population	-0.00362 (-4.62)***	-0.00067 (-0.85)
Log-likelihood	-1846.48	-2860.63

Notes: ** 1% < p-value < 5%; *** p-value < 1%.

Test statistics are in parentheses.

State and year fixed effects are not reported.

Mark Gius (2015) The impact of state and federal assault weapons bans on public mass shootings, Applied Economics Letters, 22:4, 281-284, DOI: [10.1080/13504851.2014.939367](https://doi.org/10.1080/13504851.2014.939367)