

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 28, 2024

Dr. Mandy K. Cohen, MD, MPH
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Director Cohen,

We are writing today to urge the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to provide guidance on how to include gun violence in future Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) screening tools, prioritize studying gun violence as an Adverse Childhood Experience and prioritize funding, including policy evaluation research, focused on assessing the trauma caused by gun violence in our country.

An Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) is a traumatic event or set of events that occurs for a person during childhood (0-17 years). Many clinicians and professionals across the country will screen children for ACEs as it provides them with information on the likelihood of whether that child may be experiencing toxic stress. Experiencing toxic stress, particularly for children, can impact many things, including their physical and mental health, their brain development, and their ability to succeed and thrive later on in life.¹ Once an ACE clinical assessment has been completed, clinicians can create individualized plans to address and mitigate the harm a child is experiencing due to the ACEs. Gun violence needs to be explicitly part of these ACE screening tools.

Far too many American children — an estimated 3 million each year — are exposed to gun violence.² Gun violence is the leading cause of death among children and teens in our country.³ On average, 23 children and teens are shot a day.⁴ Seventeen of those youth will survive but carry emotional and sometimes physical scars for the rest of their lives; six of those youth will die. The majority of those deaths are due to gun homicide, which encompasses everything from stray bullets to domestic violence and disproportionately impacts Black and Brown youth.

¹ Nelson, C. A., Scott, R. D., Bhutta, Z. A., Harris, N. B., Danese, A., & Samara, M. (2020). Adversity in childhood is linked to mental and physical health throughout life. *BMJ (Clinical research ed.)*, (Online at <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m3048>).

² David Finkelhor et al., “Prevalence of Childhood Exposure to Violence, Crime, and Abuse: Results from the National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence,” *JAMA Pediatrics* 169, no. 8 (August 2015): (Online at <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.0676>).

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death, Injury Mechanism & All Other Leading Causes, (Online at <https://wonder.cdc.gov/controller/saved/D158/D389F304>).

⁴ Brady United Against Gun Violence, “Gun Violence in America Statistics,” (Online at <https://www.bradyunited.org/resources/statistics>).

Though gun homicide accounts for the most youth deaths, firearm suicide rates are rising at an alarming rate. Over the past decade, the firearm suicide rate among children in the U.S. increased by a staggering 57%.⁵ Today, although the majority of youth suicide victims are white, the firearm suicide rate for children of color is rapidly increasing. Such high rates of daily gun violence mean that American children are threatened, afraid or traumatized where they live, play, and, infamously, where they learn. This compounding trauma is something that needs to be explicitly captured and more broadly defined when it comes to screening for ACEs. The CDC needs to provide additional guidance for clinicians and professionals to be able to capture the trauma from gun violence in their respective screening mechanisms.

Additionally, the CDC's ongoing research regarding ACEs serves as a robust framework for comprehensively understanding childhood trauma. ACEs wield significant influence on future experiences of violence and long-term health outcomes and opportunities throughout one's life. Scientific and medical research on a variety of public health issues has led to policy changes that have saved lives for decades, which is why Congress has, on a bipartisan basis, appropriated funds for the CDC to study firearm injury and mortality prevention research since Fiscal Year 2020. To that end, we request that you provide an overview of the CDC's plans to study firearm violence, specifically as it relates to studying gun violence as it relates to an ACE and assessing the overall trauma that people are experiencing today living under the constant threat of gun violence.

We thank you for your engagement on this issue and stand ready to use this critical research to shape public policy to ensure that gun violence is neither the leading cause of death for children nor a primary cause of trauma for children.

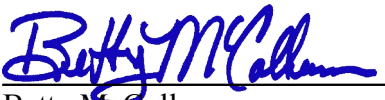
Sincerely,



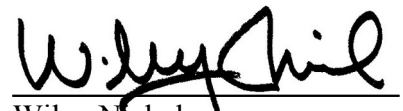
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

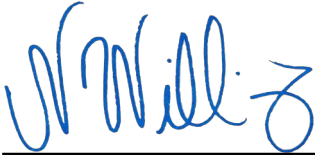


Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

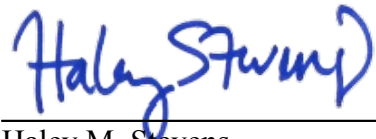


Wiley Nickel
Member of Congress

⁵ Brady United Against Gun Violence, "Firearm Suicide Rates are on the Rise," (June 2022) (Online at <https://www.bradyunited.org/resources/research/firearm-suicide-rates-rise>).



Nikema Williams
Member of Congress



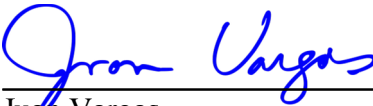
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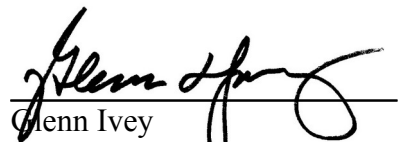
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