



**WASHINGTON BUREAU · NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE**

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January 29, 2019

The Honorable Mike Thompson  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**RE: NAACP STRONG SUPPORT FOR H.R. 8, THE *BIPARTISAN BACKGROUND CHECKS ACT OF 2019***

Dear Congressman Thompson,

On behalf of the NAACP, our nation's oldest, largest and most widely-recognized grassroots-based civil rights organization, I would like to thank you for your inspired leadership in introducing H.R. 8, the *Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019*. While increased background checks will not solve all our nation's gun problems, the enactment of H.R. 8 would be a huge step in the right direction, and would keep firearms out of the hands of those who clearly should not have them. It will close the dangerous gap in federal law that makes it possible for individuals who are prohibited from gun possession, like domestic abusers and persons with violent criminal histories, to have easy access to firearms. This is a moderate, common sense piece of legislation that would have a significant impact on reducing gun violence and saving lives.

Gun violence disproportionately impacts communities of color in the United States. Gun violence is the number one killer of African Americans aged 15 to 34. Despite the fact that African Americans make up only 13% of the U.S. population, we represent nearly 50% of all gun homicide victims. Over 80% of gun deaths of African Americans are homicides. 49% of deaths of African-American males between ages 15 and 19 are homicides — more than the next nine leading causes of death combined. Their white counterparts die from homicides in less than 8% of deaths. In 2016, the number of African Americans who died from firearms was almost twice the number of White Americans. In 2017, guns became the third leading cause of death for children and teens in the U.S. — in some states even surpassing the number of those killed by car accidents, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Furthermore, being African American increases a child's likelihood of dying from gun violence tenfold. Moreover, the "survivors" of gun violence often suffer from untold damages, both physical and mental. Given the disproportionate damage gun violence is having on our communities, the NAACP has advocated for a number of sane, sensible laws such as H.R.8 which will help decrease the damage and death caused by gun violence.

Under current federal law, only licensed gun dealers are required to conduct a background check before completing a gun sale. However, individuals who are not licensed dealers are free to sell guns under federal law without conducting a background check and with no questions asked. This is a significant gap in the law that allows individuals who are prohibited from gun possession to evade that law and buy guns through these private sales transactions at gun shows, online, or anywhere else.

The current background check system is working: over 3 million firearm sales to prohibited persons were blocked when federally licensed gun dealers ran background checks. This bill would update the current law and ensure that individuals who are barred from gun possession are not able to easily buy them through private sales. States that require a background check or permit to purchase a handgun have seen reduced rates of gun homicides, suicides by firearm, and gun trafficking.

Requiring a background check for every gun sale is a common-sense policy that will help save lives. Gun violence kills an average of 35,000 people each year in the U.S. It is a public health crisis that devastates our communities every day. Congress should act quickly to pass this legislation and take a critical first step in addressing the scourge of gun violence and making our country safer.

Thank you again for your leadership and your wisdom in introducing H.R.8. Because a decrease in gun violence is a priority for the NAACP, we are committed to working with you at the federal, state, and local levels to educate the American population on the need for H.R. 8 and on its benefits to our people and our nation. Should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at my office at (202) 463-2940.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hilary O. Shelton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Hilary O. Shelton  
Director, NAACP Washington Bureau &  
Senior Vice President for Policy and Advocacy