

Teresa Cleghorn

Thank you for requesting input from Texans about how we can prevent mass violence. I ask that the Legislators end Gun Free Zones and encourage more teachers and citizens to get trained and prepared to defend themselves. I think we need more people authorized to defend themselves by passing Constitutional Carry in order to equalize people from lower income groups. These points are more important now than ever before in light of cities cutting police funds either because of budgetary constraints in a pandemic economy or buckling under pressure from Marxist rioters.

In the White Settlement Church shooting, the church had approached the issue of security by training a volunteer group of congregants in firearms. When the shooter entered with a shotgun hidden under his coat, pulled it and began firing, trained civilian responders were there and armed, ready to defend their community. I believe this situation would have ended much worse had not those defenders been present and armed. Churches used to be "Gun Free Zones" and easy targets for evil-doers. The Church's prior planning led to a much less devastating outcome.

Too frequently our schools are the softest targets for violence because so many people confuse the tool, a gun, with the potential for violence. These well-meaning but completely wrong people pushed to have schools named Gun Free Zones. Then they made sure there were signs posted in case a bad guy didn't know that the school was unprotected. I spent 18 years teaching. I practiced "active shooter drills" with my students, knowing that the plan to hide - or throw staplers- was ridiculous. I would have thrown myself in front of my students if needed, considering each of them as much mine to protect as my biological children. Why, however, was I not being asked to bring my concealed carry gun with me, so I would actually have a chance to put an end to a threat to my students? Why aren't more LTC teachers given this option? How many lives could have been saved in mass school shootings had teachers been allowed to carry on campus? We need more armed teachers prepared to protect our community's children, not less.

As far as Red Flag laws and allowing mental health professionals to decide whose property the government may confiscate without due process, I think we have already seen how easy these laws are to manipulate. Abusers call in saying the victim threatened them with a gun... well, the victim has a right to defend themselves. Guns are a great equalizer when the abuser has size and strength on their side. Guns are more often used to protect than they are used offensively.

Which brings me to another point - most of these "research" and statistics being cited combine all use of guns into the same category, whether it is justified use, self-defense, or suicide. To get an honest picture of "gun violence" these must not be lumped together. Twice in my life, I defensively used a gun to ward off violence to me or my family. While my husband was an active duty soldier pulling an overnight shift and I was a young mother of two children, a person attempted to break into my home by a military base. The sound of a 12-gauge shell being racked into my shotgun sent them away. My husband was at first skeptical, but found the pry

marks around a sliding door enough proof. The second time was 15 years later, my husband was a civilian Texas Peace officer testifying in a trial that included gang activity. A car full of gang members followed me and my daughter home from the high school where I worked in order to intimidate me - and through me, my husband. They pulled into my driveway after me, shouting threats and honking the horn. I rushed my daughter into the house, but I came back out holding that same shotgun. They left. I realize that both instances could have been worse, but being able to stand my ground and defend my family was important to me, and is not something that should be taken away from other young mothers. The Texas Peace Officers who responded to my daughter's 9-1-1 call that day told me that when a person needs police immediately, it too often takes them seven minutes to be on the scene.

I am just one person and maybe my situations in these two instances were unusual, but I have never felt that my life was more remarkable than someone else's. As we in Texas deal with unusual times, economic uncertainties, and a possible increase in violence, we need our elected representatives to ensure that we will have the right to protect ourselves, our homes, and our property from violent people. We need to keep our children in our schools safe from evil-doers by ending Gun Free Zones. We need Constitutional Carry so long wait times, fees, and paperwork are not insurmountable barriers to poorer families. We need to avoid enacting Red Flag laws that, while well-meaning, are easily manipulated. As you, the House Committee on Mass Violence, listens to testimony from out-of-state organizations and experts, please remember that one good person with a gun can be the difference we need to keep Texas safe.