



September 17, 2025

**RE: Building Safe, Healthy, and Caring Communities for Our Children**

Dear Chair Latz, Chair Mohamed, and Members of the Senate Gun Violence Prevention Working Group:

Thank you for calling Minnesotans together to answer this critical question: ***How can we prevent school shootings in Minnesota and make our statewide communities safe for our children to play, learn, and pray?*** This must be the question that grounds our conversations inside the Capitol, and inside our homes, schools, congregations, and neighborhoods. Our children are waiting. Silently and vocally, they are waiting for us to quiet their worried minds and fearful hearts. Now is the time for us to listen to our own stirrings as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, caregivers, and neighbors, and pass comprehensive legislation to ensure no more children are killed by guns when they are playing, learning, or praying. The horrors our children experienced while praying during school Mass at Annunciation Church and School must never again be part of childhood.

The shooter at Annunciation Church and School was armed with three guns – a 5.56 semi-automatic assault-rifle, a 12-gauge shotgun, and a 9mm semi-automatic pistol. All three guns were purchased legally. In less than two minutes, the shooter fired 116 rifle rounds, and 3 shotgun rounds, killing 8-year-old Fletcher Merkel and 10-year-old Harper Moyski, injuring 18 more children and 3 adults, and forever changing the lives of countless Minnesotans. According to an Affidavit filed in Hennepin County District Court by the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, police recovered ten large capacity magazines at Annunciation Church and School – four large-capacity magazines that were empty after the shooting and six large-capacity magazines that were unused and contained an unspecified quantity of live cartridges. The shooter had enough ammunition to harm more children, and had the Annunciation Church doors not been locked, more children likely would have been harmed. Harm to one child is too much.

Children's Defense Fund Minnesota (CDF-MN) believes in a comprehensive approach to creating safe spaces for Minnesota children. We urge the Senate Gun Violence Protection Working Group to consider the following policy recommendations:

**Building Safe Communities by:**

- Banning large-capacity magazines
- Banning assault weapons
- Instituting buyback programs for large-capacity magazine assault weapons and large-capacity magazines
- Expanding firearm background checks
- Launching a statewide public health campaign focused on safely storing firearms and ammunition, and reporting a family member who may pose a "red flag" for gun violence (Extreme Risk Protection Orders)
- Incorporating age-appropriate gun safety lessons into school curriculum
- Adopting the Say Something Anonymous Reporting System statewide
- Developing a statewide communications protocol for schools to use during and after an event requiring lockdown

**Building Healthy Communities by:**

- Increasing access to mental health services beginning during infancy and continuing throughout childhood and into young adulthood

- Addressing potential warning signs of violence frequently exhibited by school shooters, including the development of resources and trainings for parents and caregivers
- Expanding family home visiting to serve families with children and adolescents who are experiencing isolation, having suicidal thoughts or concerns, or having thoughts about violence
- Developing a public awareness campaign about civil discourse

**Building Caring Communities by:**

- Creating Gilbert's Friends – a statewide pet therapy program, named in honor of Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman's dog, for elementary school students
- Extending the Second Step program beyond elementary school
- Expanding opportunities for mentorship, beginning with students in fifth grade and continuing throughout high school
- Providing funding for communities to heal from the trauma of school shootings, including funding for memorials, such as the Red Lake Memorial, to honor the lives of the children and adults killed and injured during the Red Lake Senior High School shooting in 2005

While Children's Defense Fund Minnesota (CDF-MN) believes in a comprehensive approach to creating safe spaces for Minnesota children, we believe banning both semi-automatic assault weapons and large-capacity magazines must be part of Minnesota's approach to protecting our children. These weapons and magazines enable school shooters to kill the greatest number of children in the shortest amount of time. Assault weapons and large-capacity magazines have no place in our neighborhoods and communities. Every child is a gift, and the loss of one child's life is a devastating loss to our communities.

During the federal assault weapons ban from 1994 to 2004, the number of mass shootings and the number of deaths from mass shootings decreased. According to a 2019 study published in the American Journal of Public Health, *The Effect of Large-Capacity Magazine Bans on High-Fatality Mass Shootings, 1990-2017*, large-capacity magazine bans "appear to reduce both the incidence of, and number of people killed in, high-fatality mass shootings." Between 1990 and 2017, there were 69 high-fatality mass shootings in the United States. In states where large-capacity magazines were legal, the incidence of high-fatality mass shootings was more than double the rate in states where large-capacity magazines were banned. The annual number of deaths resulting from high-fatality mass shootings in states where large-capacity magazines were legal was more than three times higher than the number of deaths in states where large-capacity magazines were banned.

Minnesotans must work together to ensure the terror our children experienced at Annunciation Church and School isn't experienced by another child. We all believe that children should be and feel safe when they go to school. This common belief can ground and guide our conversations. Our children are waiting for us to build communities that are safe, healthy, and caring.

For forty years, CDF-MN has spoken out on behalf of Minnesota's children, urging policymakers to prioritize the health and well-being of our youngest members. Together we can build a Minnesota where all children can play on safe playgrounds, learn in safe schools, and pray in safe congregations. Together we can work to ensure children live joyfully! Thank you for your service to Minnesota and your thoughtful consideration of the child-focused policy proposals outlined above. We're grateful for your courage, sacrifice, and dedication to our children and communities.

Together For Children,

/s/ Alisha Porter  
State Director

/s/ Alexandra C. Fitzsimmons, Esq.  
Senior Policy Director