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Dear Chairman Craven and House Judiciary Committee Members,

As a retired educator, with 40+ years as a teacher and administrator, including ten years as a high school principal, I wish to offer you a different perspective than the usual arguments and data points you receive from both sides of the gun violence debate.

During my tenure as principal at St. Patrick Academy, a small Catholic high school on Smith Hill that serves the urban core population, we annually conducted at least 15 “lock down drills” – a euphemism for “active shooter drill”. Doors were locked, shades drawn, lights turned off, and all students were guided to a place in the room out of the line of fire from the doorway. Students had been taught not to cower in fear, but to grab whatever was available to hurl at an intruder who might get through the locked door. So our students, like millions of others, waited attentively, knowing that this was a drill, but forced to imagine what they would do if....

The psychological impact of these repeated drills – which our students will go through almost 200 times before they graduate – are similar to the “duck and cover” drills of the 1950s and ‘60s. Few of you had to endure those drills, conducted regularly, which posed a similarly, and falsely, optimistic scenario in which we were taught that a school desk could provide adequate cover in the event of a nuclear attack. Many of my classmates and I lived in terror at the prospect, knowing that even if we made it through alive, what about our parents, siblings, and friends?

It was more than 20 years after that before our leaders concluded that mutual nuclear disarmament was a better option than mutually assured destruction. It is my hope that it doesn’t take another 20 years before our leaders arrive at the same conclusion in this case. Living through the fear of annihilation as these children sit in a classroom, church, or theater, or walk through a shopping mall is as much an assault on them as the violent acts they prepare to face.

The 2nd Amendment does not forbid sensible measures such as the Assault Weapons Ban (H5436) before you this Wednesday. State and federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have already upheld measures to keep weapons designed for war (e.g., machine guns, bombs, hand grenades) out of the hands of citizens. Such measures will not only do a much better job of protecting our children’s bodies, but their mental health as well.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

God bless,

