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November 7, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
The White House Acting
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20050

Acting Secretary Eric D. Hargan
Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20416

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear President Trump, Acting Secretary Hargan, Leader McConnell, and Speaker Ryan:

As Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, I urge you to put policy over politics and join me in an effort to restore the federal government's ability to fully study the scope of gun violence in our country, particularly where it intersects with mental health. It is long past time to study gun violence as the public health epidemic that it so clearly is.

There are many factors that contribute to gun violence. Mental health, at least in part, plays a role in the increasing number of mass shootings we see in communities across the nation. I fully support the federal government's response to the opioids epidemic as a public health crisis. However, every year, more people die from gun violence than opioid overdoses. For example, in 2015, 33,091 people died from prescription pain reliever and heroin overdoses, while 36,252 people died from guns. These families deserve every opportunity to prevent these tragedies in their communities as well. Accordingly, I call on all Members of Congress and relevant administration officials to join the Congressional Black Caucus in fighting to remove the prohibitory effect of the "Dickey Amendment," a policy rider that has been misinterpreted to prohibit the Department of Health and Human Services from using appropriated funds to study mental health and gun violence. We reserve our right to advocate for sensible gun regulations, but want to make it clear that we are requesting the ability for scientists to do research and research only.

As you may know, the "Dickey Amendment" was first included as a policy rider in the 1996 omnibus spending bill (P.L. 104-208). This is widely reported as the result of aggressive lobbying by the National Rifle Association following a 1993 Center for Disease Control and Prevention study that found that gun ownership is

associated with an increased risk of homicide in the home. While this appropriations provision does not specifically reference gun violence, this policy has had an unfortunate chilling effect on agency action that has prevented substantive research on the causes and impacts of gun violence. Ultimately, as a result of the inclusion of the "Dickey Amendment" in appropriations bills since that time, scientists have been stifled from studying the links, if any, between gun ownership, mental health, and gun violence in this country. This has been a major disservice to the policy making community, as well as to the citizens of the United States, as important conclusions based on data and empirical research have gone undiscovered for almost two decades. This places all of our communities at risk and leaves us all lost for a solution to prevent the next candlelight vigil in memory of loved ones lost to gun violence.

How many more incidents like Sutherland Springs, Las Vegas, Charleston, Plano, Orlando, Newtown, Blacksburg, Columbine, San Bernardino, Fort Hood and others must occur before we concede that the status quo has left us with no other moral option but to affirmatively address the epidemic of gun violence head on? These are just some of the mass shootings that made national news in recent years. At the time of this writing, there have been more mass shootings in the United States in 2017 than days, not to mention the tens of thousands of families that are impacted by gun violence every year.

The victims of the mass shooting at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs were lifting up their voices in prayer as they tragically lost their lives to gun violence. To properly honor their lives, we must do more than keep them in our thoughts and prayers. We must study the causes of gun violence, including any correlations between these incidents, gun possession, and mental health issues. As public officials and representatives of these communities, we have a responsibility to do everything in our power to end gun violence and studying the causes and repercussions is a reasonable first step in addressing this issue.

The time to act is now. I urge you to join us in this effort and fully fund this critical research in the next spending bill.

Sincerely,



Cedric L. Richmond
Chair, Congressional Black Caucus

CC: Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer
House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi
Wayne LaPierre, Executive Vice President and CEO of the National Rifle Association