

Testimony of Eva Jones, Hood River, Oregon
DPCC Hearing on: “America Speaks Out: Protecting Our Children from Gun Violence.”
March 7, 2018

Hello, I am Eva Jones. I am a sophomore from Hood River, a rural town in Oregon. Since middle school, the first day of school has been accompanied by not only the excitement of a new year, but what should be irrational worries. Every time I walk into a new classroom, I plan where I would hide in the case of a school shooting. I think about how dangerous it is to have so many windows that look out to the beautiful Columbia River. This is the daily reality of over 50 million schoolchildren across the United States. I have friends whose hearts jump every time someone enters the classroom unexpectedly.

After every shooting around the country, my teachers explain to my classmates and me how they’d sacrifice their lives for us, that they’d tackle a shooter if they somehow entered the classroom. In my math class, instead of learning about integration techniques, we discuss the pros and cons of hiding under our desks like we are told or attacking the intruder. I would like to say we are terrified, that would be the rational response. Don’t get me wrong, there is a part of us that is, but school-wide murder has been so normalized by gun culture that we approach these like a fire drill. This makes me sick. Millions of children are rationally preparing for a student slaughter, and this is completely normalized.

We cannot allow our nation to go along with this any longer. It is not normal to visualize myself hiding in the closets of Ms. Noteboom’s room during Journalism class. It is not normal to have my teachers instruct us that, if there ever is a shooting, we are to lock the door immediately and leave the shooter outside to look for stragglers. It is not normal to have two or three gun threats a year, to wonder what makes the police so sure that some threats are “not credible.”

We, the students, the victims, are left in dark. We are on the receiving end of everyone's analysis of the situations, but it's time for our analysis. I live in rural Oregon, I have plenty of gun-owning neighbors, but to kids it's not a partisan issue. The NRA lobbyists are making this a divisive matter. It's not, American citizens do not need access to military-grade weapons-of-war. It's time for America to put the education and lives of their children before their gun fetish.

Government officials and adults who haven't set foot in a school in over 30 years are calling for "tighter" security in our schools. These adults don't know what school is like today. Most schools across the country are equipped with identification on entry, locked door policies, and on-campus police. Increasing police presence, locking students in, installing safety huts and metal detectors, these are all notions based on the acceptance that our schools are going to get shot up in America. As a student, I can assure you that's not the answer. It is a teacher's job to create an innovative learning environment for their students. Locking up our schools would inhibit any growth and imagination. Turning American schools into prisons will completely destroy any educational environment that fosters learning and curiosity. If you are immersed in an atmosphere of fear and walls, you cannot focus on creative problem solving and growth.

Security is not the issue, so don't try to put this on our tireless teachers and school administrators. This is not a complex issue, we need legislation to increase background checks, close all loopholes, raise the gun-ownership age, and ban all assault weapons. All semi and fully automatic weapons, all accessories, all military-grade weapons of war. Do not try to pass the blame or responsibility. It is your job to ensure our safety through legislation, not mine or my teachers. I don't need to read out statistics to show you that rates of gun violence in America surpass every other developed nation.

I am not content to allow my peers to learn in an environment like this any longer. America's students will not be complicit to watch our classmates' murders week after week. We are the ones most affected by these shootings, and we cannot even vote. It is infuriating to have our lives valued less than a collectable. We are not going to accept this. We are sick of living like this, so I can assure you we will be relentless. We won't stop marching. We will keep fighting weapons and those who protect them over us. We will vote, soon, and we aren't going to stop until something changes.