

Testimony of Fred Guttenberg
DPCC Hearing – March 7, 2018

Three weeks ago, February 14th or Valentine's Day, a day of love, started in my house like any other. With chaos. We were making sure the kids got off to school, and as usual they were running late. The dogs were barking and needing to be taken care of. My wife and I needed to get ourselves ready for work. That is what I remember. It is what I cannot remember about that morning that still haunts me. I cannot remember if I told my daughter that I loved her as she ran out the door to leave for school. I cannot remember if at the very last moment that I saw my daughter if I said, "I love you." My kids left for school that day like any other. Only one of them would make it home. My daughter Jaime was murdered/hunted in school on Valentine's Day and I cannot remember if I ever told her that I love her that morning. We are forever changed. I am no longer just a dad to Jesse and Jaime. My wife, who is intensely private, not only lost her baby girl but it happened in a way that was horrific and public.

In life, I always used to tell my wife and the kids that as long as I wake up in the morning and those I love and care about are safe and healthy and go to sleep at night and everyone is still safe and healthy that it was a good day. Everything else in between was just a bunch of stuff that we had to manage and get through. Unfortunately, we have been having some bad days. Jesse my son, my wife Jen, and I will have to go on without Jaime in our house. Our family and friends who lived for her voice and spirit will not feel it ever again. It will be different. Her humor, her craziness, her energy, and her feistiness, will be missed. My baby girl was the energy in our house. She was the energy in every room that she went into. Our new normal will be a lot quieter. I will miss the sounds of her laughter, her "dog" talk, her unbelievable ability to never stop talking and how quickly she would say things because she always had so much to say. They were the sounds that gave our life meaning and our house energy. Jaime lived life, she was the energy in the room, she always made her presence known. Jaime was also a competitive dancer. This was her passion. Two weekends ago was the first competition, always an event in our home and something that we all looked forward to. Rather than being at competition weekend with Jaime, my wife and I went to visit her instead at the cemetery.

The day after this murder I attended a vigil in Parkland. I was asked if I wanted to speak and I said yes. I had not prepared, but I had a lot that I needed to say. This was the beginning of my public life. My life is now forever changed as my public role continues to evolve. I have dedicated the rest of my life to fighting for the cause of gun safety. I will not stop. No other parent should ever go through what my family and 16 other families are going through. What is unfathomable is how this is not unique to us. This had become something that was becoming way to common. This time, the gun rights crowd messed with the wrong community, the wrong kids, and the wrong dad. My kids were everything to me, and I intend to be a part of breaking the gun lobby.

There are simply too many shootings and too many losses of life for us as a civilized society. Over my crash course this past couple of weeks, a couple of things have become clear to me. The gun lobby simply has too much influence over lawmakers regarding decisions on our safety. The gun lobby uses the language of mental health and the language of paranoia to incite and scare people into the belief that they need to have guns and any attempt to put normal limits on that, as we would with anything else, is the start of a government over reach that must be prevented. I have quickly come to realize that most legislators are simply not leaders. They follow the mob or the money. It is clear to me, that even

though we elect our lawmakers with the expectation that they will be strong leaders, most of them are followers.

The gun lobby talks about the 2nd amendment. I happen to believe in the 2nd amendment, just not the bastardized version presented by the gun lobby and expressed by the lawmakers who follow it. Unfortunately, this bastardized version has led to these weapons of war being widely available and as a result my daughter has been murdered. She had rights as well, including her right to be a believer in the 2nd amendment, and all of her rights have now been terminated. We cannot allow a gun lobby who truly believes in no limits to control the decisions of lawmakers, as no other person should be afraid of getting shot for simply being in school or some other public place. Because our lawmakers will not do the right thing out of fear of the gun lobby, we need to break the lobby. How can we do that? Pierce the aura of strength and take away the money. In Florida, even after this mass murder, too many legislators are still opposed to any gun legislation and are bowing to the gun lobby's wishes. The only reason that the gun lobby would be opposed to the most minimal effort getting proposed is that it pierces the aura of strength that they have. Once legislators start gun safety legislation, this is a loss for the lobby and others will follow.

The most significant hits to the gun lobby are being lead by corporate America as they are being heroic. They are doing two things. First, they are terminating direct business relationships with the lobby to end financial benefits to the members and to weaken the lobby financially. Second, they are ending the retailing of weapons of war and simply not waiting on lawmakers to change the age to 21. They are doing it on their own. Shame on weak kneed lawmakers who can't come to common sense measures as well. Corporate America will lead and show you can take on the lobby and not pay a price. Legislators will watch and eventually follow. In addition to changing the gun culture in this country, again an effort being led by corporate America, but one that I predict legislators will eventually follow, we need to get the NRA to open its books. We need to show America where they get their money and where it goes. People need to understand that the NRA effort is not done with the safety of Americans as its main concern and most likely has some more concerning purpose.

This will not be easy and will take time. I have an idea that ensures gun owners can keep their weapons, does not infringe on rights, and yet the NRA would be dead set against it. Why don't we force every gun owner, in addition to background checks, have them register, license, and insure every gun that they buy and own just as they would a car. Make the process of owning a gun more difficult and expensive. Make sure that the process of owning a gun also includes responsibility. The gun lobby would be against these common sense efforts and so would the legislators who support the lobby. This alone gets to the BS about this being a 2nd amendment issue. As the kids from Parkland say, we need to call BS from now on. Anyone who has a legislator that will not fight for your safety, we all need to vote and fire them.