

**Testimony of Francine Wheeler
Sandy Hook, CT
DPCC Hearing – March 7, 2018**

I live in Sandy Hook, Connecticut. I'm a mother and a music teacher. I have three boys, the youngest is three and the oldest is about to turn fifteen. Our middle son Ben wasn't the middle son when he was six; on December 14, 2012, I got him a hot chocolate at Starbucks, dropped him off at school and never saw him alive again. He was killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School about a half an hour after I dropped him off.

I'm not here to tell you about that day, or that week or the few months that followed. I want to tell you about the last five years. The five years after what was left of my family stood in a classroom at Newtown High School and President Obama hugged me and wouldn't let go until I could catch my breath and stop crying. "It's different this time because people are taking it personally," he said.

I miss Ben every day but some days are more awful. Every time there's been a mass shooting since Ben and his classmates and teachers were killed, our world is rocked again. We've fought the urge to stay under the covers in the morning so many times now it's become a familiar struggle. Every time, I have to see the faces in the grocery store and their looks of weary care, concern and pity. Every time, my husband has to go to his office where his sympathetic and generous coworkers leave him alone until they can get a read on how he's doing. Every time, an administrator at our eldest son's school emails, calls, texts, goes completely out of his or her way to make sure that he is okay; does he need space? Does he need to talk? Is he really okay?

Every time, the gaping chasm of loss in my heart is opened once more, regardless of how successful I may have been at patching it up until that point. The aching pain in my chest the size and shape of my six-year-old-son is laid bare once again.

After each one of these events, we're not the ones who really need the help. The ones who need the help are the fresh ranks of the grieving, the shattered shells of family members left to sort out how to make sense of this insanity. And every single time, the previous group moves one place further to the back and watches more families line up in front of them, while they experience their own individual, specific version of what I've related to you here.

My argument for sensible gun legislation to change the course of these horrific tragedies is not a speculative fear of what might happen to me or my family. My argument lies in the earth a few miles from my front door in our town cemetery, six years old forever. And I'm just one. Just one mom in this expanding congregation of grief. Please do something meaningful and serious.