The Honorable Harry Reid Majority Leader U.S. Senate S-221 U.S. Capitol Washington, DC 20510 The Honorable Mitch McConnell Republican Leader U.S. Senate S-230 U.S. Capitol Washington, DC 20510

## Dear Senator Reid and Senator McConnell:

The undersigned medical organizations, together representing the vast majority of practicing physicians and medical students in the United States, share the nation's grief and sadness over the recent tragic school shootings in Connecticut. As physicians, we see first-hand the devastating consequences of gun violence to victims and their families. We offer our experience and expertise in finding workable, common sense solutions to reduce the epidemic of gun violence—indeed the overall culture of violence—in America. We also urge the nation to strengthen its commitment and resources to comprehensive access to mental health services, including screening, prevention, and treatment.

The investigation into the Connecticut shootings is still continuing, and the issues surrounding such violence are often complex and can vary significantly from case to case. Strategies for preventing gun-related tragedies must also be complex and carefully considered. The relatively easy access to the increased firepower of assault weapons, semi-automatic firearms, high-capacity magazines, and high-velocity ammunition heightens the risk of multiple gunshot wounds and severe penetrating trauma, resulting in more critical injuries and deaths. Even for those who manage to survive gun violence involving these weapons, the severity and lasting impact of their wounds, disabilities and treatment leads to devastating consequences for families affected and society, and contributes to high medical costs for treatment and recovery. Renewing and strengthening the assault weapons ban, including banning high-capacity magazines, would be a step in the right direction.

Many of the deaths and injuries resulting from firearms are preventable. More resources are needed for safety education programs that promote more responsible use and storage of firearms. Physicians need to be able to have frank discussions with their patients and parents of patients about firearm safety issues and risks to help them safeguard their families from accidents. While the overwhelming majority of patients with mental illness are not violent, physicians and other health professionals must be trained to respond to those who have a mental illness that might make them more prone to commit violence. Funding needs to be available for increased research on violence prevention in general, and on the epidemiology of gun-related injuries and deaths in particular, as well as to implement available evidence-based interventions. Of equal importance is providing sufficient access to mental health services. While we strongly supported the passage of the Mental Health Parity Act of 2008, unfortunately, the promise of better access to

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psychiatric treatment will not be a reality absent requisite federal and state funding. This effort should be combined with an education campaign that reduces the stigma of seeking mental health services.

Newtown, Connecticut has now been added to the sad litany of recent mass shootings, including Columbine, Virginia Tech, Fort Hood, Arizona, and Aurora. As we come together as a nation to mourn the most recent victims of senseless gun violence, we must make a real and lasting commitment to work together on meaningful solutions to prevent future tragedies. We stand ready to work with Congress and the Administration to make progress in protecting our communities, especially our children, from this epidemic of violence.

Sincerely,

American Medical Association American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry American Academy of Family Physicians American Academy of Pain Medicine American Academy of Pediatrics American Academy of Urgent Care Medicine American College of Emergency Physicians American College of Mohs Surgery American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine American College of Osteopathic Internists American College of Phlebology American College of Physicians American College of Preventive Medicine American College of Radiology American College of Surgeons American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists **American Geriatrics Society** American Osteopathic Association American Psychiatric Association American Society for Clinical Pathology American Society of Plastic Surgeons Association of American Medical Colleges College of American Pathologists North American Spine Society Renal Physicians Association Society of Critical Care Medicine The Society of Thoracic Surgeons

California Medical Association Colorado Medical Society Connecticut State Medical Society Medical Society of Delaware Medical Society of the District of Columbia Illinois State Medical Society Maine Medical Association MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society Massachusetts Medical Society Michigan State Medical Society Minnesota Medical Association Nebraska Medical Association Nevada State Medical Association Medical Society of New Jersey New Mexico Medical Society Oklahoma State Medical Association Oregon Medical Association Rhode Island Medical Society South Dakota State Medical Association Tennessee Medical Association Texas Medical Association Vermont Medical Society Medical Society of Virginia Washington State Medical Association Wisconsin Medical Society