**On Advocating for the Reduction of Firearm Violence**

**Recommendation:**

The Peacemaking and Justice Committee overtures the **Synod of the Covenant** Annual Assembly (November 1-2, 2019): to do the following:

1. communicate through open letters with the Governors and legislative bodies of Michigan and Ohio to convey the Synod of the Covenant’s alarm and concern concerning the rise in gun violence and mass shootings, and the failure of Michigan and Ohio state governments to respond to reduce such violence, and to address root causes;
2. limit the sale and ownership of firearms to pistols and shotguns in Michigan/Ohio;
3. ban the sale, possession, and use of all assault weapons in Michigan/Ohio;
4. ban concealed carry permits to civilians and inactive law-enforcement personnel in Michigan/Ohio;
5. require of gun owners to purchase appropriate insurance, periodic licenses, and background checks in Michigan/Ohio; and
6. urge all councils (sessions & presbyteries) within the bounds of the Synod of the Covenant to communicate the same to the governors and legislative bodies.

**Rationale:**

At the time of the writing of this overture, we are shocked at the senseless and tragic loss of life in Dayton, Ohio, (9 killed and 27 injured) which is in the bounds of our Synod, and in El Paso, Texas (22 killed and 26 injured) - both due to mass shootings occurring within hours of each other and where in both cases the shooter used assault weapons capable of firing multiple bullets in seconds. Such weapons should not be condoned in our communities. And these two mass shootings are the 249th and 250th mass shootings in 2019!

We grieve that such hate and anger is directed at innocent people in particular immigrants as in El Paso and people of color both in El Paso and Dayton.

As Presbyterians we must speak out.

**Red-flag** laws have been shown to reduce deaths by suicide. A 2018 study[[1]](#endnote-2) of the effect of risk-based firearm seizure laws in Connecticut and Indiana demonstrated that such laws are associated with a reduction of population-level firearm suicide rates. Moreover, 60% of firearm deaths are by suicide,[[2]](#endnote-3) thus adding to the value of these laws in reducing overall deaths from firearms.

**Universal background** checks have been shown to reduce firearm violence. According to a review article in the Annual Review of Public Health, “some prohibitions for high-risk individuals (e.g., those under domestic violence restraining orders, violent misdemeanants) and procedures for checking for more types of prohibiting conditions are associated with lower rates of violence.”[[3]](#endnote-4) Another study of Connecticut’s permit-to-purchase handgun law and homicides found that "that Connecticut’s handgun purchaser licensing law is associated with a subsequent reduction in homicide rates. . . . committed with firearms”.[[4]](#endnote-5)

An argument against universal background checks is that the two instances of mass shooting which recently occurred in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, the shooters purchased the firearms legally. This observation highlights the importance of a **ban on the sale of assault weapons,** such as those used in most mass shootings, in addition to comprehensive background checks. A ban on large capacity ammunition magazines is also important as they can be used to inflict as much harm as possible to as many people as possible in a very short time. The shooter in the Dayton, Ohio had a 100-bullet magazine at his disposal!

A law on the ban of sale and ownership of assault weapons may be designed with a buyback program for those who owned such weapons before the ban. It has been shown by several studies that such bans decrease the occurrence of mass shootings and the lethality of such shootings.

For example, a study of US gun owners from 1998 to 2015 published in BMJ (The British Medical Journal) demonstrated that “States with more permissive gun laws and greater gun ownership had higher rates of mass shootings, and a growing divide appears to be emerging between restrictive and permissive states”.[[5]](#endnote-6)

And in a study of the 1994-2004 federal assault weapons ban and its association with deaths due to mass shootings demonstrated that “mass-shooting related homicides in the United States were reduced during the years of the federal assault weapons ban”.[[6]](#endnote-7)

In conclusion, assault weapons provide mass shooters the ability to kill many people in a very short period of time. In Dayton, Ohio it took only 30 seconds to kill 9 people and injure 27. There is an alarming increase in occurrence of mass shootings.

**We must act.**

1. Aron J Kivisto, Ph.D., and Peter Lee Phalen, M. A. Effects of Risk-Based Firearm Seizure Laws in Connecticut and Indiana on Suicide Rate, 1981-2015. Published on line: 1 June18 | https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201700250. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Garen J. Wintemute. The Epidemiology of Firearm Violence in the Twenty-First Century United States. Annual Review of Public Health, Vol 3:5-19, March 2015. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031914-122535. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Daniel W. Webster and Garen J Wintemute. Effects of Policies Designed to Keep Firearms from High-Risk Individuals. Annual Review Public Health, Vol. 36:221-37, March 2015. On line: ttps://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031914-122516.Annual Review of Public [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Kara E. Rudolph, Elizabeth A Stuart, Jon S Vernick, and Daniel W. Webster. Association between Connecticut’s permit=-to-purchase handgun law and homicides. Am J Public Health. 2015 Aug;105(8):e49-54. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2015.302703. Epub 2015 Jun 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Paul M Reeping, Madalena Cerda, Bind Kalesan, Douglas J Wiebe, Sandro Galea, and Chales C Branas State gun laws, gun ownership, and mass shootings in the US: cross sectional time series. BMJ 2019; 364 dos: https:/org/10.1136/bmj.I542. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. DiMaggio, C, Avraham J, [Berry C](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Berry%2520C%255BAuthor%255D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=30188421), [Bukur M](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Bukur%2520M%255BAuthor%255D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=30188421), [Feldman J](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Feldman%2520J%255BAuthor%255D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=30188421), [Klein M](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Klein%2520M%255BAuthor%255D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=30188421), [Shah N](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Shah%2520N%255BAuthor%255D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=30188421), [Tandon M](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Tandon%2520M%255BAuthor%255D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=30188421), [Frangos S](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Frangos%2520S%255BAuthor%255D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=30188421). Changes in US mass shooting deaths associated with the 1994-2004 federal assault weapons ban: Analysis of open-source data. J Trauma Acute Care Surg. 2019 Jan; 86(1):11-19. doi: 10.1097/TA.0000000000002060. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)