



For Immediate Release
June 17, 2016

CONTACT:
Greg Wright
202.336.8324
gwright@naswdc.org

National Association of Social Workers reacts to Orlando Massacre

Association calls for gun control laws, gun deaths to be treated as public health threat, and end to culture of hate

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The nation awoke on June 12 to the worst case of a single person committing mass murder with a gun in its history. A gunman killed 49 people and injured more than 50 at Pulse, an Orlando nightclub that serves a predominately LGBTQ clientele. Most of the victims were also Latino.

Compounding such a horrific loss of life is the fact the man who committed the murders may have been motivated by a complex mix of ISIL-inspired terrorism, anger toward American culture, bigotry, homophobia and internalized self-hatred because he may have had gay tendencies. He also had legal access to assault weapons with high capacity magazines. All of this formed a lethal combination.

However, as disturbing as the Orlando massacre was, it was only one of 91 gun-related mass murders in 2016 alone (mass murder is defined as four or more victims including the gunman). Moreover, within the last 10 years, there have been [371 deaths from mass gun shootings](#). Overwhelmingly, the shooters' weapons of choice were high-powered, semi-automatic assault guns and rifles.

As seen in the massive loss of life and injuries at the Orlando nightclub, such weapons are meant to inflict death or devastating wounds. Without easy access to assault weapons, it is unlikely the carnage of Orlando, Sandy Hook or Virginia Tech would have left so many dead and maimed.

This tragedy should be seen as both terrorism and a hate crime, just as the mass murder of nine black members of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina was a hate crime. All of which adds another dimension to developing strategies for greatly reducing mass shootings in the United States.

There are concrete steps that public officials and the public at large can take to reduce the frequency of such disasters:

1. As a country, we must recognize that mass shootings are only a fraction of gun violence in the United States and we must look at gun violence in its totality. More than 35,000 people die each year from guns from a range of incidents including suicides, inner-city violence and accidents. Children between the ages of 5 and 14 in the United States are also 17 times more likely to be murdered by firearms than children in other industrialized nations.
2. Federal, state and local officials must approach gun violence, including mass shootings, as a public health emergency similar to how we are reacting to the opioid/heroin crisis. Such a declaration would prompt a national mobilization to prevent gun violence and greatly reduce the number of victims of gun violence.
3. Embracing a public health approach to gun violence would also necessitate more research on the causes and population-based impact and result in recommendations for addressing the crisis.
4. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) recommends Congress lift the ban that prevented the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) from initiating research on gun violence, and should authorize funding for such comprehensive studies.
5. Sensible gun laws must be implemented, especially those that restrict access to assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines.
6. The country must change the culture of hate that now proliferates in social media, radio and on cable television. The Orlando massacre was driven by hate just like the mass shooting at Emmanuel AME Church and the shooting of six Sikhs in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

NASW offers its condolences to the family and friends of the victims and the survivors. We also empathize with the pain of members of the LGBTQ community, which has experienced yet another hate attack. It is up to all Americans to stand up for an end to mass murders and all forms of gun violence. It is also up to all Americans to recognize that hate speech and intolerance are the precursors to hate crimes.

Social justice organizations must become proactive in advocating for sensible gun laws such as a ban on assault weapons and high capacity ammunition magazines, as well as strengthening background checks for gun purchasing. Organizations must also support Congress lifting the ban on CDC's ability to conduct research on gun violence, and ensuring they have sufficient funds to carry out comprehensive research.

###

[The National Association of Social Workers \(NASW\)](#), in Washington, DC, is the largest membership organization of professional social workers with 130,000 members. It promotes, develops, and protects the practice of social work and social workers. NASW also seeks to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities through its advocacy.