

January 7, 2013

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of the 145,000 members of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), which is the largest professional association of social workers in the United States with 56 chapters across the nation and internationally, we commend your swift and appropriate response to the senseless tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut. Your message regarding new restrictions on firearms and improved access to mental health services was critical in this time of devastation and loss.

NASW, and the 650,000 social workers across our nation, stand ready to work with your Administration, Congress, and state governments to assist with this significant undertaking. Social workers in Connecticut, and across the nation, have already volunteered mental health and first responder services, and will continue to provide guidance and support in Newtown, and all communities, that are affected by this senseless tragedy.

NASW has also been a longtime advocate for greater access to mental health services and we believe that this is the most important component of the broader conversation regarding safety. We have learned from these increasing incidents of deadly violence that mental health prevention and treatment for those that need it most would have been the best investment possible. Despite this era of fiscal responsibility, such services are critical and could be lifesaving. Approximately 25 to 50 percent of adults experience mental illness in their lifetime, and although the vast majority of those people will not pose a risk to themselves or others, we can improve our nation's productivity, reduce stigma attached to mental illness, and enhance overall health and wellbeing by investing in mental health. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and this era of health and fiscal reform, present an opportunity for us to address these serious challenges and develop real solutions. These must include increased funding for public, school, and community-based mental and behavioral health services. Further, we must treat mental health in the same manner that we treat physical health and develop a workforce capable of responding to increased need.

We express our condolences to the community of Newtown, CT as well as victims of all shootings in our country. We recognize that we are already too late with a comprehensive plan to prevent such violence and we implore decision makers to finally learn from this tragedy and act now. Please call upon NASW if we can serve as a resource. I can be reached at 202.336.8200.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth J. Clark, PhD, ACSW, MPH  
Executive Director