

My name is Bernadette Hampton. I am a high school math teacher and I serve as the president of The South Carolina Education Association. I would like to thank Mrs. Merrill Chapman and others for the invitation to reflect on a very crucial issue which is at the top of every conversation since the massacre in Parkland, Florida-gun violence and how we address it.

I would like to commend Senator Chauncey K. Gregory and Senator Marlon Kimpson and for their vision and work to be proactive instead of reactive to address gun violence by introducing Senate Bill 516.

School shootings and widespread community gun violence are far greater in the United States than any other nation. America is founded on the promise of life, liberty and the pursuit of justice.

Members of The South Carolina Education Association support the passage of laws to help stop gun violence in schools and communities. Schools are the cornerstone of American democracy as this is the place in which our children should be free to learn without the threat of death. As advocates for children and teachers, our organization believes that there are common sense solutions by way of laws and policies that will help us move away from preparing for shootings and ensuring that prevention is the standard.

South Carolina's low rankings on gun violence are astonishing. According to the Center for American Progress, South Carolina's rates of gun crime are some of the worst in the nation. As of 2010, 1 person is killed every 14 hours in our state by a gun.

Addressing children's social and emotional needs, school climate and culture, bullying, and the whole child approach allows us to minimize the challenges of teachers but promote student achievement and a meaningful learning experience.

Guns in the hands of teachers and metal detectors are not the answer. If we want to arm teachers, provide them with the resources, tools and services needed to ensure that children get what they need to be productive citizens in our community. Bills like Senate Bill 516 allow us to limit the possession of firearms and provides for reporting mechanisms that will trigger investigation of at-risk individuals.

We have a responsibility to our children. They are speaking loud across this country. South Carolina, regardless of our dire gun violence statistics will not be left behind. We as a community have got to get the job done. We, the members of The South Carolina Education Association stand with you.