August 5, 2019

Bazelon Center Statement on the Recent El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio Shootings

Once again, as on far too many past occasions, our hearts break for the victims of mass violence, their families and friends, and their communities. This time, those communities were El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio. In one of these incidents, the shooter appears to have acted out of hatred and fear of immigrants.

At the same time, we condemn the efforts of some to conflate hatred, bigotry and racism with mental illness. Reflexively blaming gun violence on people with mental illness is unhelpful and unsupported by evidence. Less than five percent of gun violence is attributable to mental illness. Having a mental health diagnosis is not a predictor of violence, and people with serious mental illnesses are far more likely to be victims of violent crime than perpetrators of it. Casting all mass gun violence as "a mental health issue" is not only unfounded, but distracts from efforts to address the true causes of gun violence. It serves only to promote fear and prejudice against individuals with mental health needs. As the American Psychological Association's president observed, it is important to focus on evidence-based solutions rather than "routinely blaming mass shootings on mental illness."

We stand with those who want effective policy solutions to address gun violence. Falsely blaming mental illness is not such a solution. Hate is not a mental illness. It is time for those of all political persuasions to do better.