

Leaders and Allies of the Disability Community Unite in Joint Statement on Gun Violence

Read the statement [here](#)

For Immediate Release:

September 26, 2019: A coalition of 38 organizations including leaders and allies in disability rights, civil rights, education, and privacy communities issued a [joint statement](#) affirming that mental health disabilities are not predictors of gun violence and that people with mental health disabilities must not be scapegoated for the acts of mass gun violence in this country.

Despite clear evidence to the contrary, the President and some legislators have recently stated that people with mental health disabilities are the primary perpetrators of gun violence. This coalition condemns this false and dangerous rhetoric and urges legislators to reject any legislative proposals that are premised on this false assumption which puts the civil rights of Americans with disabilities at risk.

The coalition's joint statement affirms that:

- Hate and racism are not mental health disabilities, nor should they be treated as such.
- Building more institutions, as the President proposes, unjustly threatens the civil rights and freedom of people with mental health disabilities while doing nothing to reduce gun violence in this country.
- Proposals aimed at identifying students with disabilities at a young age as potential threats only serve to further isolate and stigmatize students.
- Effective reform can and should be accomplished without compromising the civil rights of people with disabilities.

"It is hard to overstate the damage done by efforts to blame people with psychiatric disabilities for gun violence. They sow prejudice and fear, undermining the opportunities for people with psychiatric disabilities to live, work and be full participants in their communities" said Jennifer Mathis, Director of Policy and Legal Advocacy at the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law.

"Rebuilding institutions is a misguided solution to gun violence," said Curt Decker, Executive Director at the National Disability Rights Network. "Not only are people with

mental health disabilities the wrong focus for addressing gun violence; the very proposition of building new institutions would be a giant step backwards.”

"Rhetoric and policies that target people with mental health disabilities does direct harm to children with complex medical needs and disabilities who are significantly more likely to be the victims than the perpetrators of violence," said Erin Gabriel, Director of Advocacy at Little Lobbyists. "Proposals that would identify children early on as 'high-risk' would only feed a potential school to institution pipeline, violating the civil rights of these individuals while doing nothing to curb gun violence. We must address the cause of violence instead of further stigmatizing and isolating adults and children with complex medical needs and disabilities."

Signatories of [**Joint Statement from Members of the Disability Community and Allies on Gun Violence Prevention Policy and Mental Health Disabilities:**](#)

- ***American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)***
- ***Advocacy Unlimited, Inc.***
- ***Alliance for Excellent Education***
- ***American Association of People with Disabilities***
- ***Association of University Centers on Disabilities***
- ***Autistic Self Advocacy Network***
- ***Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law***
- ***Center for Public Representation***
- ***Connecticut Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance***
- ***Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Inc.***
- ***Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance***
- ***Disability Rights Connecticut***
- ***Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF)***
- ***Gift of Voice***
- ***Hon. Tony Coelho, Author of the Americans with Disabilities Act***
- ***Keep the Promise***
- ***Little Lobbyists***
- ***Mental Health America***
- ***National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities***
- ***National Association of County Behavioral Health & Disability Directors***
- ***National Association of School Psychologists***
- ***National Association of Secondary School Principals***
- ***National Center for Learning Disabilities***
- ***National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery***
- ***National Council on Independent Living***

- *National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools*
- *National Disability Rights Network*
- *National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund*
- *National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse*
- *New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services*
- *Oregon Mental Health Consumer Psychiatric Survivor Coalition*
- *Pennsylvania Action: Protecting Disability Rights*
- *RespectAbility*
- *TASH*
- *The Alliance for Excellent Education*
- *The Arc of the United States*
- *The Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy and Innovation*
- *The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights*

The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law (www.bazelon.org) is a national non-profit legal advocacy organization that advances equal opportunity for people with mental disabilities in all aspects of life.

The National Disability Rights Network (www.ndrn.org) is the nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Systems and the Client Assistance Programs (CAP) for individuals with disabilities. Collectively, the Network is the largest provider of legally based advocacy services to people with disabilities in the United States.

Little Lobbyists (www.littlelobbyists.org) is a family-led group advocating for children with complex medical needs and disabilities to ensure they have access to the health care, education, and community inclusion they need to survive and thrive.

Media Contacts:

Jennifer Mathis, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, 202-467-5730 ext. 1313/
jenniferm@bazelon.org

David Card, National Disability Rights Network, 202-408-9514 ext 122/
david.card@ndrn.org

Erin Gabriel for Little Lobbyists, 781-534-2541/ erin@littlelobbyists.org