



Feb. 16, 2018

STATEMENT ON THE RECENT SHOOTING IN PARKLAND, FLORIDA

On Wednesday, February 14, as on far too many days this year – and in past years – there was a school shooting. Our hearts break for the victims, their families and friends, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School community, and the community of Parkland, Florida. We must, however, condemn the responses of some politicians, advocates, and journalists conflating a mental health diagnosis, or the perception of one, with a propensity for violence. Such ill-informed responses inappropriately scapegoat the millions of Americans with mental health disabilities and do nothing to further gun violence prevention.

The Bazelon Center, along with mental health experts such as the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association,¹ has repeatedly explained that having a mental health diagnosis is not a predictor for an act of violence or a mass shooting. In fact, people with serious mental illnesses are far more likely to be victims of violent crime than perpetrators. Moreover, past acts of violence are far more predictive of future violence than any other indicator.

Despite these facts, it has become commonplace for some to blame these tragedies on mental illness, and call for the country to focus on the “mental health crisis” rather than on guns. Among those are many politicians who have repeatedly proposed gutting Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, both of which provide significant support to people with mental health disabilities. Others have demanded that individuals be reported to the federal gun database just because they have a mental health disability – a step that no evidence suggests will meaningfully lessen gun violence. Such proposals further perpetuate discriminatory and damaging rhetoric against people with mental health disabilities – the vast majority of whom are not likely to commit acts of violence – while ignoring the evidence of actual causal factors, like a history of domestic violence.

We stand with those who want answers and effective policy solutions in the face of such frequent, senseless, and horrific violence. But false and harmful claims and attacks on “mental illness” not only fail to address the primary issue, they further discrimination against individuals with mental health disabilities. It is time for us to do better.

¹ American Psychiatric Association, *Position Statement on Firearm Access, Acts of Violence and the Relationship to Mental Illness and Mental Health Services* (2014) <https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/About-APA/Organization-Documents-Policies/Policies/Position-2014-Firearm-Access.pdf>; American Psychological Association, *Resolution on Firearm Violence Research and Prevention* (2014) <http://www.apa.org/about/policy/firearms.aspx>. The Atlantic, *Untangling Gun Violence from Mental Illness* (2016) <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/06/untangling-gun-violence-from-mental-illness/485906/>.