

A RESOLUTION OF THE JACKSON COUNTY DEMOCRATS

Resolution No. 2020-5

Treating Gun Violence as a Public Health Problem

Whereas, we recognize that most gun owners support responsible gun ownership, including secure storage and safe use of guns, the fact remains that guns are used to kill more than 30,000 and injure more than 60,000 Americans annually. In 2017, gun deaths reached 39,773, the highest in nearly 50 years (1-2); and

Whereas, gun violence is a major public health problem facing all people of the United States, it is especially hard on children and children of color. In 2017, “there were 144 police officers...and about 1000 active duty military...who died, whereas 2,462 school-age children were killed by firearms”. While the number of deaths of school age children is more than double that who voluntarily put their lives at risk, there is also a racial inequality to these numbers as 41% of gun deaths occur in black children, a racial inequality that has increased in the five years between 2013 and 2017 (3); and

Whereas, the racial disparities in how guns’ kill is stark: black Americans are “10 times more likely than white Americans to be murdered with a gun” (4) and gun deaths to white Americans are suicides, while gun deaths to African Americans are generally homicides (5) which reflect systemic racism in unjust justice systems and the external and internal disrespect for African Americans; and

Whereas, a similar situation occurred in 1966 when the US Congress decided to treat automobile accidents as a public health issue, leading to laws and policies that have dramatically reduced deaths per mile driven (6). Automobile usage and ownership is heavily regulated, yet many law-abiding people in the U.S. still use cars and the government has not inappropriately confiscated them; and

Whereas, the American Public Health Association (APHA) believes that “The issue of gun violence is complex and deeply rooted in our culture, which is why we must take a public health approach to ensuring our families and communities are safe. We must place a renewed emphasis on improving gun injury and violence research.” (2); and

Whereas, public health research suggesting increased access to guns might lead to increased violence precipitated the Dickey amendment to the 1996 omnibus spending bill (7), which effectively stifled public health research into gun violence. A recent omnibus spending bill clarified that the Dickey amendment allows for research into gun violence and in December 2019, a modest funding of \$25M was granted to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) (8-9); and

Whereas, despite a lack of research, initial scientific evidence supports that a waiting period between application for and actual purchase of firearms reduce homicides by 17% (10); and

Whereas, in the Supreme Court decision declaring that the second amendment protected the rights of individuals, District of Columbia v. Heller, Justice Antonin Scalia was very clear that substantial gun regulation was constitutional (11); and

Whereas, the current Covid-19 pandemic has driven up gun sales because people are fearing potential civil disorder that may accompany a breakdown in societal institutions (12) and firearm-related mortality rates in the United States remain the highest amongst all high-income countries (13); and

Whereas, the American College of Physicians, the American College of Surgeons, the American Bar Association, and a plethora of other professional and public organizations believe that a comprehensive public health approach to addressing this growing crisis is necessary (13).

NOW, THEREFORE, THE JACKSON COUNTY DEMOCRATIC PARTY RESOLVES AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1: We urge the State of Oregon Legislature to:

- a) increase its support for a public health approach to reduce gun violence; and
- b) advocate for laws and regulations regarding, but not limited to, sales, access, safety, and design. Design could include trigger locks and signals that the gun is loaded.

Section 2: We urge the state of Oregon to:

- a) treat gun violence as the serious public health crisis that it is; and
- b) look for the results of the CDC/NIH evaluations on the effectiveness of firearm policies, violence prevention efforts, and answers to basic questions about gun ownership; and
- c) support the continuing efforts of others working to help prevent gun violence; and
- d) support those in the state who are working to get politicians to seriously address police reform.


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Resolution submitted by the Platform and Resolutions Committee.

ADOPTED by the Jackson County Democratic Party Central Committee on the 23rd day of July, 2020.



Tonia Moro,
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