



ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

Statement on Gun Violence in America The Executive Committee of the Association of American Universities, on Behalf of the Association

The Association of American Universities, which comprises 60 leading U.S. and two Canadian research universities, believes that the time has come for the United States to confront our culture of violence, particularly violence perpetrated by guns. The Newtown slaughter is the latest in a series of mass murders, but the nature and number of its victims have caused Americans to devote special attention to this tragic event and its causes. Our schools and campuses have unfortunately become centers of national mourning, from Columbine to Virginia Tech, and now Newtown.

As leaders of public and private universities, we strongly urge the President and the Congress to seek effective means of mitigating this scourge of American life. We believe that strong, meaningful action needs to occur in three domains: gun control, care of the mentally ill, and the culture of our contemporary media.

We claim no special expertise in these domains, although our faculties include such experts whose knowledge should be engaged in the search for effective responses. We know that there are no simple “solutions” to violence in America, but we do believe that all three areas require focused and serious consideration by the President and the Congress. Many high-powered weapons that have no legitimate use for hunting, marksmanship, or self-defense continue to be bought and sold, as are the high-volume magazines often used by mass murderers. Increasingly, universities find themselves prevented by state laws from keeping guns off campus and out of the hands of students.

Mental illness has played a role in mass violence in America. A thorough examination of the care and treatment of the mentally ill surely should be part of the search for effective responses to the plague of mass violence. This is a complex problem, but one our political leaders need to address, with the assistance of experts in the mental health community. It is also clear that our media, from television to video games and the Internet, are saturated with depictions of violence, much of it aimed at our youth. Here too the issue is complex because of the nation’s fundamental commitment to freedom of speech, but moral suasion seems clearly required if we are to stem this tide of the media’s addiction to violence.

Progress in all three of these domains is made difficult by the need to balance liberty and safety. We are particularly sensitive to this difficulty because our universities hold freedom of inquiry and learning as a core value. Relentless commitment to the pursuit of truth has

been a crucial factor in making our universities the best in the world. But as a nation we should not turn away from addressing gun control, care of the mentally ill, and the culture of our contemporary media because of the difficulties those subjects pose. We should instead draw upon the best thinking to craft effective responses.

The AAU applauds the Administration's call to identify means of reducing America's culture of violence. We implore the Congress to work with the Administration to apply honest and open scrutiny to identifying and implementing meaningful, consequential actions now, while the nation is focused on Newtown's searing tragedy.

AAU Executive Committee

Scott S. Cowen
President, Tulane University
Chair

William C. Powers
President, The University of Texas at Austin
Vice Chair

Mary Sue Coleman
President, University of Michigan
Past Chair

Robert J. Birgeneau
Chancellor, University of California,
Berkeley

Gene D. Block
Chancellor, University of California, Los
Angeles

Richard H. Brodhead
President, Duke University

Ronald J. Daniels
President, The Johns Hopkins University

Amy Gutmann
President, University of Pennsylvania

Mark A. Nordenberg
Chancellor, University of Pittsburgh

Hunter R. Rawlings III
President, AAU

David Skorton
President, Cornell University

January 2, 2013