

Local Group Takes on Gun Violence in Wake of Newtown Massacre

Relatives and neighbors of children killed in the elementary school massacre in Newtown, Connecticut, one month ago launched an initiative on Monday to help curb gun violence in America.

“On Friday, Dec. 14th, I put two children on the bus and only one came home. I pray that no mother, father, grandparent or caregiver of children ever have to go through this pain,” said Nelba Marquez-Greene, whose 6-year-old daughter Ana Marquez-Greene, a first grader with brown eyes and black curls, was killed in the shooting.

One month after the shootings that left 20 children and six adults dead, the group, called **Sandy Hook Promise**, vowed at a press conference to transform public outrage into action to “make our communities and our nation a safer, better place.”

Named for Sandy Hook Elementary School where the shootings took place, the group pledged to hold debates on wide-ranging safety issues and come up with a plan of action. At least half a dozen pairs of parents of children slain in the attack appeared on stage with the organizers, some making their first public appearances since the shooting, all holding photographs of their son or daughter.

“There is no quick-fix single action but instead a multitude of interlinked actions that are needed,” said Nicole Hockley, whose son Dylan, a blue-eyed, blond-haired six year old, was also killed.

The killings plunged the rural New England town of 27,000 into grief along with much of the country and prompted President Barack Obama to form a task force headed by Vice President Joe Biden to find ways to curb **gun violence**.

Biden submitted recommendations Tuesday. He has said that he will recommend universal background checks for gun buyers and limits on the ammunition capacity of magazines. Gun rights groups said on Sunday that these restrictions would fail in Congress.

The Newtown group offered no specific solution or policy position, but co-founder Thomas Bittman said its aim is to drive a national conversation on three issues: gun ownership and regulation, mental health, and school and public safety.

"Some of us who came together to start Sandy Hook Promise are gun owners," Bittman said. "We hunt. We target shoot. We protect our homes. We're collectors. We teach our sons and daughters how to use guns safely.

"We're not afraid of a national conversation within our community and in Congress about responsibility and accountability," Bittman said.

The National Rifle Association, the biggest **gun rights** lobby group, has predicted that Obama's drive for new limits on firearms and ammunition sales will fail in Congress.

U.S. Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat from Connecticut who attended the event in the basement gymnasium of Newtown's former town hall, warned the NRA against being too confident of congressional inaction.

"I think what is possible politically today changed a month ago today," Murphy said, referring to the Dec. 14 school attack. "It's the NRA's job to say that no gun control legislation can pass Congress, but they're wrong."

The elementary school, about 70 miles northeast of New York City, remains closed to everyone but police who are still investigating the attack. Its students, more than 400 children in kindergarten through fourth grade, are attending school in the neighboring town of Monroe.

Residents on Sunday began debating what to do with the school itself. At a town meeting attended by several hundred people, including Sandy Hook parents, it was clear there is no early consensus on whether the building should ever be used again as a school.

Newtown First Selectman Patricia Llodra, the town's top elected official, said it would be months before a decision on the facility's future is reached.

Authorities have not offered a motive for the attack. The gunman, Adam Lanza, 20, killed his mother before driving to the school and shot himself dead after the rampage.

Editing by Barbara Goldberg and Nick Zieminski.

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