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As I close the door tonight after putting my almost-4-month-old baby daughter to bed, I fear for the world she'll grow up in. My husband and I spent 3+ years struggling with infertility to conceive our beautiful daughter, and I'm terrified for what her future holds — or if she'll even have a future if it's ripped away by gun violence, as countless lives have been.

My husband and I moved to Maine from New York City almost 4 years ago. I lived in New York for over 15 years, and I can say with confidence that I have felt more unsafe in Maine than I ever did in my years of living in a major US city. The devastating and preventable mass shooting in Lewiston confirmed those fears. I gave birth to my baby in November of 2023. Having a newborn in the winter is challenging in many ways. In an effort to get out of the house, get some exercise, and a change of scenery during Maine's cold winter months, a friend suggested I take the baby to the mall and walk around with the stroller. The first thought that came to my mind was fear of a mass shooting, and how I couldn't even imagine having to run away from gunshots with my newborn in a shopping mall — a place I'd go to attempt to improve my postpartum mental health. In fact, I hardly ever go to the mall for that very reason. I'd rather pay shipping fees for the rest of my life than risk my life.

This is what gun violence has done to us. Americans - and especially families with young children - now fear what used to be normal, fun outings. Every time I'm in Target or Hannaford, I scan the parking lot and look for someone suspicious. Most of the time, I prefer to do curbside pickup because it's just not worth it. But then I recall the shooting not too long ago of a family while driving on 295, and I remember we truly aren't safe from gun violence anywhere. Not even in our cars.

The mass shooting at Columbine happened when I was a freshman in high school. I am part of the founding class of the school shooting generation. I remember that year so vividly and how terrified and shaken me and my classmates were that such a thing could ever happen. Little did I know that it was only the beginning. 20+ years later and that same young girl is now afraid to go to the mall out of fear of getting shot. People's right to own dangerous weapons of war should never take precedence over our freedom to live life without crippling fear of gun violence. My daughter deserves to grow up in a school system that doesn't include the trauma and normalizing of active shooter drills. This is not normal. Other countries do not deal with gun violence at this scale and the evidence is clear — they have stronger gun laws.

I refuse to live in a world where I'm at risk of becoming a statistic every time I leave my house. Parades, shopping malls, concerts... When will it end? Schools were once considered safe havens for all children, but now they're tainted with the fear of deadly gun violence of our most innocent Americans. It happens so frequently now that we've almost become numb to it. How sad is it that for the first time since Columbine that no school shootings occurred was during Covid lockdowns? We have groups actively banning books and history on the basis of "protecting children," yet we subject our kids to the risk of dying at the hands of military-style weapons of war, because it's someone's "right" to own them? In a country that claims to care so much about the innocent lives of children, we are failing them, and our weak gun laws are actively harming and literally killing them. And our lawmakers have done nothing to prevent future mass shootings from happening.

Our kids deserve better. They deserve more. "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" does not include kindergartners barricading a classroom door and dying such a violent death that their tiny bodies can't be identified. Living life in fear is not liberty, and certainly isn't happiness.

Please pass stronger gun legislation immediately. Please help parents and kids sleep better at night. Make our public spaces safe again. Let us go one month without another tragic "breaking news" headline of a mass shooting in America. My daughter deserves a full and happy life without the fear of gun violence woven into every aspect of her life. Please do better. This is your legacy.

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