

Greetings and thank you to Senator Hughes and Senator Muth for inviting me to participate today. My name is Gina Pelusi and I am a gun safety advocate and the Legislative Lead for the Pennsylvania Chapter of Moms Demand Action.

I first joined Moms Demand Action back in the beginning of 2017, carrying with me my own personal story that I was not ready to share. I wanted to understand what types of things I could do to end gun violence, but never expected this work to play such a pivotal role in my life.

Back in 2014, my mother Ruthanne Lodato, answered a knock at the door of our home. It was a cold, but sunny Thursday morning, and she opened the door to a stranger who opened fire and shot her multiple times. She was rushed to the hospital but the damage was too great and she died that day. We would later learn that the man who shot her was a convicted felon who legally should have never had access to a weapon.

My mom was a music teacher, a woman of faith, and one of the kindest neighbors you could ask for. She was not just my mom, she was a wife, a sister, an aunt, a godmother, and a caretaker to my grandmother. She was the person who showed up with a homemade meal after a family in the neighborhood had a new baby, without asking, and often without leaving a note. She was a small business owner and the glue that held our family together. Being a mother now, I have a greater appreciation for how she juggled so many things at a time, and never let one fall through the cracks. I'm sad and I'm angry that my children don't know their grandmother personally and that my mom isn't growing old with my father. I am angry that a man who shouldn't have had a weapon stole her from us.

Initially I did not understand how sharing my personal story and pain could make an impact. Our "why" and our stories are vital to the work we do. Most of the time, people's eyes glaze over when they start to hear statistics, which is why making this work personal for people is imperative so that they understand this could happen to anyone, anywhere.

I first shared my story publicly at the March for Our Lives in Pittsburgh back in 2018 and I haven't looked back. I will not let my mom, Ruthanne, become a statistic. She was a person and her life mattered, and so do the lives of the 120 people killed by a firearm each and every day in this country. I will never walk away from this work. It has allowed me to channel my grief into action and to give my mom and so many other victims a voice.

I was in the State House gallery in the Spring, when the House passed two life saving gun safety bills: HB1018 or EPRO, which temporarily removes firearms from anyone known to pose a threat to themselves or others, and HB714, which requires background checks on all gun sales. We have been talking with volunteers about these pieces of legislation, and a lot of people don't realize that under current PA law there are ways to buy a gun without a background check. They don't realize that an unlicensed seller could sell someone a rifle without a background check or that someone could buy a shotgun without a background check at a gun show or online. Once people learn those facts, they are usually horrified. [93% of voters](#) in the US, 89% of Republicans, and 89% of gun owners support requiring background checks on all gun sales, and there's a good reason why: background checks save lives. Those numbers overwhelmingly prove that there is bipartisan support for this type of legislation, so now it's time to pass it in Pennsylvania.

Moms Demand Action and Students Demand Action were in Harrisburg at the beginning of October to rally and ask the Senate Judiciary Committee to consider holding a hearing and a vote on these two bills. Several lawmakers remarked to us that it was the most energy they had felt in that building in some time. We spent our summer in our Gun Safety Era, focusing on phone calls, texting, postcarding, and letter writing to members of Senate Leadership and the Judiciary Committee. We did not take the summer off, because the reality is we know that gun violence did not take the summer off - it is still happening each and every day.

We also spent our summer supporting our community partners in their direct service work with domestic violence survivors, suicide prevention, and community gun violence intervention. We spent time at summer camp with kids who have been impacted by violence, donating blood for victims in need, honoring survivors during National Gun Violence Awareness Day, and much more.

Moms and students also worked on spreading the message of the importance of secure firearm storage through our BeSMART program. We have set up booths at National Nights Out, Auto Shows, school events, hospitals, Pride events, minor league baseball games, and more unlikely places to pass out free gun locks and talk to Pennsylvanians about the importance of preventing unauthorized access to firearms.

This past couple of months gun safety advocates have spent countless hours door knocking, postcard writing, and phone banking behind our Gun Sense lawmakers. We know that each and every election matters and the message we are sending our lawmakers this November is that if a candidate will not support gun safety, we will vote them out.

I am here to ask you, as a concerned parent – to meet this moment. When tragedy strikes it's easy to look back and ask ourselves “what could have we done?”. As gun violence continues tearing our communities apart, we must ask ourselves now “what can we do to save lives?” and I believe this bill is a clear answer.

Background checks save lives by keeping guns out of the hands of people with dangerous histories, and their importance is universally agreed upon. Now is the time to make background checks on all gun sales the law in this Commonwealth.