

Commonsense gun laws can help end firearm violence

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Joseph Sakran, MD, was just 17 when a stray bullet changed his life—after nearly ending it.

The Virginia teen was hanging out with friends following their high school's first football game of the season when an altercation broke out at a park nearby. A stranger pulled out a .38-caliber handgun and fired. The bullet ripped into Joe's throat, rupturing his trachea and damaging his carotid artery. He was hospitalized for weeks, and his senior year was interrupted by multiple surgeries. His voice remains raspy even now, due to the injury to his vocal cord.

But from that time forward, he knew what he wanted to do with his life: become a trauma surgeon like those who had saved his life. As director of emergency general surgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Dr. Sakran and his team have treated hundreds of people with horrific gunshot wounds, not all of whom survived as he did.

Dr. Sakran is just one of 14 physicians sharing their firsthand experiences with firearm violence in an amicus brief filed by the AMA and others in the case of *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association Inc. v. Bruen*, which was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court on Nov. 3. The question posed by the case is whether New York's denial of a permit to carry a concealed firearm in public violates the Second Amendment. The Medical Society of the State of New York, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry joined us in filing this brief.

Responding to gun violence

As a responsible gun owner and a hunter, I understand the importance of protecting the rights granted to us under the Second Amendment. But I also understand the deeply held conviction held by Dr. Sakran, and by the other physicians who participated in the amicus brief, that units of government like the New York State Assembly must be allowed to respond to gun violence in their communities by enacting and enforcing protection measures as allowed by our Constitution.

I am proud of the AMA's long-standing commitment to reducing gun violence while supporting measures to increase the safety of firearms and their use. We recognize that gun violence is an increasing public health crisis in our nation, and we have repeatedly reaffirmed policies supporting expanded background checks for handgun purchases, waiting periods for firearms, and tighter enforcement of state and federal gun-safety laws.

Appropriate and lawful measures

None of these policies conflict with the Second Amendment, and all are in accordance with legal precedents regarding gun ownership established by the courts. It is important to note that the U.S. Supreme Court has, through prior decisions, established the rights of states to devise and implement policies to control firearm violence.

The New York law in question in this particular case allows any eligible person to own and use a handgun within his or her home without showing cause; it imposes additional requirements only when an applicant wants to carry a concealed handgun in public.

Dr. Sakran believes that commonsense measures such as New York's concealed-carry law are an essential element of effective public-safety policy. For Dr. Sakran—and for other trauma surgeons, emergency physicians, nurses and all the other health professionals who work so valiantly every day to save the lives of gunshot victims—the nightmare of this public health crisis never ends.

It makes no sense to Dr. Sakran, and it makes no sense to me, to throw out appropriate and lawful concealed-carry laws such as the one in place today in New York. We will never end the scourge of gun violence by allowing more people to carry more firearms in more places.