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On December 14th, 2012, the world watched in horror as 20 year-old Adam Lanza shot twenty 1st grade students and six faculty members at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. As he made his way through the school, Lanza shot anyone he encountered, ignoring the desperate pleas of teachers attempting to save students' lives. Of the two classrooms of children he massacred, one child survived; a six-year old girl laid in silence on the ground next to her bloodied classmates pretending to be dead. When all grew quiet, she fled the school grounds for safety. Eventually reaching her mother, she softly said, "Mommy, I'm okay, but all my friends are dead."

The Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting is not an isolated incident. Since 1982, there have been 62 mass shootings across the country with seven occurring in 2012 alone. Interestingly, of the 143 guns possessed by the killers, more than three-quarters of them were obtained legally; their arsenals included dozens of assault weapons and semiautomatic handguns with high-capacity magazines. The average age of the killers was 25 with the youngest a mere eleven. And, importantly, the majority of them were mentally ill, and most displayed signs of it before they set out to kill.

America has long been heavily armed relative to other countries. Thanks to a legislative landscape shaped by pro-gun groups such as the National Rifle Association, today there are over 300 million guns in the hands of private citizens in a country of a little over 314 million. "How relevant is the 2nd Amendment today?" which in full states, "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed." Our Founding Fathers included the 2nd Amendment to protect our newfound freedom from the British. And though we are granted the constitutional right of gun ownership, the founding fathers could not have fathomed the deadly sophistication of today's weaponry.

Certainly at the core of our gun-wielding epidemic is accessibility. Things are slipping through the cracks. To illustrate, it is possible today to attend any private gun show and purchase a gun without a background check. It is time to enforce existing laws and to rework those that are broken. While increased gun control will not eliminate the threat of gun violence entirely, the truth is simple: Countries with stricter gun-control laws have fewer gun-related deaths. The statistics of Australia, Canada, Japan, and the United Kingdom prove it.

Real progress will require transcending hardened politics. Gun rights promoters have framed background checks as an assault to their constitutional rights. Yet, with mental illness the leading precursor to the mass murder of innocent men, women, and children, our political leaders will simply have to advance the argument in a thoughtful, evidence driven manner, especially as it comes to funding America's dangerously and shamefully gutted mental healthcare system. It seems an easy enough call when faced with the imagery of more bullet-ridden children.