

St. Paul City Council Hearing on Gun Violence prevention

Nov. 5, 2025

Council President Knoecker (Na-ker) – my name is Dr.

Sheldon Berkowitz. I live in Ward 1 and am a retired

pediatrician and a past president of the MN Chapter of the

American Academy of Pediatrics. I am here to speak in

support of the proposed Gun Violence Prevention Ordinance

25-65.

While I understand that there are legal hurdles to overcome

before this proposed ordinance could be put in place, I

believe it is very important for this Council and this City to

make a clear message that they will do everything they can

to prevent further gun violence by banning public possession

of assault weapons and large-capacity magazines and binary triggers within the city.

As a pediatrician, I was shocked by the murder of 26 people at Sandy Hook elementary school in 2013 and then at Marjory Stoneman Douglas HS in Parkland, FL when 17 people were killed in 2018. And most recently, the murder of 2 children and wounding of many more in the shooting at Annunciation Church and School, just 1 ½ miles from where I used to live in South Minneapolis. When I was in practice at Children's Minnesota hospital in Minneapolis, I helped care for patients and families who were victims of gun violence, including the young adolescent who I cared for who had been paralyzed when a stray bullet entered her house and severed her spine, leaving her in a wheelchair for the rest of her life.

For several years now, firearms have become the leading cause of death for children and young adults in the United States. In states where laws have been passed banning assault style weapons and high- capacity magazines, they have seen a **decrease** in mass shooting deaths.

Last month, Dr. Tim Kummer, Emergency doctor at HCMC who was one of the first doctors on the scene at the Annunciation shootings, testified to the following:

“At Annunciation, the shooter fired more than 100 rounds with a high-powered rifle. That is why there were so many victims. That is why the injuries were so severe. The type of gun matters.

At Annunciation I cared for a 12-year-old girl who had what looked like a very small graze wound to the top of her head –

an abrasion, nothing else. But despite that bullet never entering her brain, the energy from the rifle was so powerful it caused severe bleeding in her brain, and she had to have part of her skull removed. “

We **should not** accept that these shooting and murders are going to be part of our society going forward. We **must** do everything we can to prevent them from continuing to happen. [I applaud this City Council for bringing this ordinance forward and urge you all to vote for it and urge our elected state officials to pass similar legislation as soon as possible.]

Dear members of the council:

I'm here today as someone who lives and works in St. Paul and has been affected by gun violence dozens of times.

I live near the Maryland Market in the North End Neighborhood – a place that has seen so much gun violence that most people in the neighborhood avoid that intersection altogether.

I have also worked in St. Paul rec centers for almost ten years. I've experienced neighbors shot dead, kids scrambling from football fields and playgrounds to avoid gunfire, staff members nearly shot at work and have dealt with the trauma that comes with responding to these incidents. We have confronted people we knew had guns to prevent the unthinkable happening in a space where guns simply do not belong. Rec centers are supposed to be a safe place to be for everyone, like schools.

We know about the many guns illegally in our centers because we've seen them and experienced the trauma of dealing with them. We also know that the number of guns we don't see are in much greater numbers. And none of the incidents I've been a part of even made the news. This notion rests in the back of every staff person's head who cares for our young people in our after-school program, or during our teen classes, and while teaching young people how to play sports and get along with each other.

The political action on gun control needs to match the will of the people. We're sick of gun violence, we don't want guns in our community spaces, we're sick of political inaction, we don't want assault weapons and ghost guns in our communities and we're sick of defending our right to safe spaces against the will of a small, packaged minority. I'm speaking in favor of this ordinance to keep guns out of our rec centers and our other cherished community spaces and to make my neighbors and neighborhood safer.

Good afternoon, my name is Khadar Greer.

I'm an activist and voice of the youth in Saint Paul, MN.

I currently do stop the violence community events centering around basketball and entrepreneurship. I train kids year round in basketball and also mentor kids in my youth program, called Journee of the Youth. That's spelled J-O-U-R-N-E-E after my niece. We lost her dad to gun violence two and a half years ago. So I'm also a survivor.

I also teach in the special education program at EXPO Elementary and am a lifelong St. Paul resident.

I see my legacy in life as doing everything I can to uplift and ensure that the generation behind me is on the right path. My annual spring event focuses on giving young kids opportunities and a sense of hope. They need to know how important it is to come together and support each others' goals.

We've hosted these events at Jimmy Lee Rec Center in the past and train at different rec centers around the city. It is really hard to maintain that sense of safety, positivity and growth when I'm also worried about people bringing guns into the space. It's to the point where I hire security for my spring event. My focus is always on keeping my kids safe.

That should be all of our focus. Always.

My other goal is that kids have the proper education and their needs met to be successful. Kids need to feel safe in order to be open, they need to be open in order to learn: whether that's their ABCs, their 123s, goal setting or how to be a good friend. They can't feel safe with the constant threat of guns coming into their trusted spaces.

I support the ban of guns in rec centers and libraries.

I support anything that keeps our kids' safety the top priority.



November 5, 2025

WRITTEN TESTIMONY – DR. RACHEL WEIGERT, CHILDREN’S MINNESOTA

Council President Noecker and Saint Paul City Council Members,

My name is Dr. Rachel Weigert. I am a mother, a pediatric emergency room physician and a gun violence prevention researcher and I am in full support of the gun violence prevention ordinance being proposed in Saint Paul.

I was working in the Emergency Department at Children’s Minnesota on the day of the Annunciation shooting. That shift began like many others, waking up early for a 7am start. My husband was driving our girls to their well child checks that morning, messaging me with questions, and later noting that it was odd that he was passing so many ambulances headed all in the same direction. He knew something was wrong, and moments later we got the call from emergency medical services that we would be receiving a 10-year-old with a gunshot wound to the head; we were almost immediately updated that this was an active shooter situation at a school.

As a level one pediatric trauma center, our staff train regularly to be able to respond to these kinds of tragic events, but the Annunciation shooting was the largest singular trauma incident we have responded to in recent history. With just five minutes to prepare for six injured children, I had to collect myself quickly. Trauma activations in the emergency department are swiftly orchestrated events, and we immediately mobilized with over fifty additional pediatric staff to care for these children. I performed that day utilizing everything I have learned in my seven years as a pediatric emergency medicine physician, while also balancing thoughts like the fact that my own daughter had her kindergarten open house the next day, and thinking of how terrified all these sweet children must be in this nightmarish situation. I quickly sent a text to my husband that read “mass shooting,” and then didn’t speak to him again for the next 3 hours.

As a gun violence prevention researcher, I am well versed in the statistics of gun violence in America, including the fact that guns have been the leading cause of death in children since 2020. But my life was changed the moment we received that phone call, and that children died in their school five minutes from my own home. The fact that this is our reality as parents is a nightmare.

That morning, we quickly cut blood-stained school uniforms from children in order to evaluate their injuries; clothes that were later bagged by police for evidence. All the children we cared for arrived without family. Some were in shock, and some were sobbing uncontrollably. I had to remind myself repeatedly to focus on the task at hand, and not let my emotions get the best of me. Because while we are prepared for a mass casualty incident, truly nothing can prepare you psychologically for something as devastating and violating as caring for children who were attacked in their own school.

It should go without saying, but any bullet can do an incredible amount of damage, especially to a child’s small body. A bullet from an automatic rifle is designed to splinter into dozens of twisted metal shards, which can instantly kill a child. When this type of bullet strikes tissue, it begins to topple end

over end, and can create a significant internal defect, almost the size of a torso in a young child. The shooter fired 116 of these bullets into Annunciation Church that morning in just under two minutes. The conversations I had with my patients that day still haunt me. The juxtaposition of one child telling me that he was shot in the back while laying on top of his friend, likely saving his life, against his innocent excitement at having received a new matchbox truck for his collection from our child life team. Another young girl also instinctively laid on top of first graders, shielding them from the spray of bullets. As I removed bullet fragments from her arm and leg, she asked how we could leave the fragment in her skull, knowing that it would be there every time she brushed her hair. Medically, I can answer these questions. But as an adult, I truly feel like we have failed our children.

The common theme I heard from the kids that day was "I knew what to do because we prepare for this". While I am in awe of these students' bravery, I am also devastated by the fact that we live in a society where we have asked this of our children and educators, to prepare with militaristic precision for the inevitability that they will be targeted and potentially murdered in their own school. As a doctor, I am supposed to train and prepare for the worst. Not kids. Not educators. Not parents.

My children, your children, and any child that calls Minnesota home deserves to know that they can stay safe from gun violence, whether at home, school, church, or anywhere in the community. Passing this ordinance demonstrates your commitment to that shared goal.

Sincerely,

Rachel Weigert, MD
Physician and Researcher, Emergency Medicine, Children's Minnesota
Adjunct Assistant Professor, University of Minnesota Medical School