

# **MARCH FOR OUR LIVES: PANEL ON GUN VIOLENCE**

The WNDC hosted a week of events leading up to the “March for Our Lives,” as well as opening the Club up for march participants and Young Dems to gather, make posters and evil eye gloves, and phone bank, among many activities.

One event was the Thursday night Forum arranged by WNDC Young Dems member Laura Tolosa, excerpts from which we are reporting below. The outstanding panelists were Dr. Valda Crowder, an emergency medicine physician; Josh Horwitz, Executive Director of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence; Lauren Alfred, Policy Director at Sandy Hook Promise; and April Goggans, a leader of DC Black Lives Matter and founder of Keep DC 4 Me. Panelists not only gave rich personal witness on gun violence but also gave attendees a rich trove of real information and facts. The more that Americans understand these facts the stronger the momentum behind the Gun Violence Prevention movement will be. In addition to our support of the March, the WNDC has launched a Gun Violence Prevention Task Force.

## ***Gun Violence as a Public Health Issue; The Importance of Research***

Dr. Crowder described how to define violence and police brutality using measurable indicators in a way that frames it as a public health issue. She impressed upon the audience the importance of performing research to identify risk and protective factors as they pertain to gun violence. Mental health screening tools need to be adequately funded. Physician gag laws to ask about firearms in homes need to be eliminated; physicians must be allowed to have a role in gun removal.

## ***Gun Restriction Laws Decrease Gun Deaths***

Josh Horwitz outlined a series of key facts: most gun deaths are suicides and there are approximately 85,000 gun-related injuries each year. He showed us data that definitively demonstrated the correlation between increased gun ownership and increased gun deaths and, conversely, how gun restriction laws decrease gun deaths. Most of the public erroneously believes that gun violence is caused by the mentally ill. However, data show that most people living with mental illness will never be violent. In reality, the risk of violence is greatest among younger males with substance abuse problems. Horwitz made the case for Gun Violence Restraining Orders (GVRO) that enable law enforcement and families to intervene when individuals demonstrate dangerous behavior.

## ***Build the Movement for Gun Reform from within People's Own Communities***

Lauren Alfred told the audience how her organization, Sandy Hook Promise, decided to focus on meeting people “where they are” with the programs and services they can align

with, and to build the movement for gun reform from within people's own communities at a grassroots level. Sandy Hook Promise's signature program is "Know the Signs"—signs and signals of people at risk of being violent. Recognizing the signs of violence is essential to preventing violent events, as four out of five people intending to perpetrate violent acts actually tell another person what they are planning to do. The Promise Leaders network has reached over three million individuals, with 4400 Promise Leaders.

**Create a Framework to Ensure that We Don't Make Certain People Safe at the Expense of Others**

April Goggans talked about how it's important to remember how minorities are often excluded from the narratives of mass shootings. It's important to think about communities that are chronically impacted by gun violence and live with that trauma every day. DC, for example, is a city with very strict gun laws and, therefore, strict consequences, which manifest inequitably between communities regarded as highly violent versus those that aren't. What we need in DC is a community-based approach that is not police-based, as such models have reduced violent crimes 70-80%. Goggans pointed out that we have tools and ways for community members to step in and take responsibility to diminish gun violence. We must ensure we don't make certain people safe at the expense of others.

-- WNDP Public Policy Committee