

Press conference statement

By: Loren Francione

Barack Obama said during a speech in 2016, "Our unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, those rights were stripped from college kids in Blacksburg and Santa Barbara, the high schoolers at Columbine, and first graders in Newtown" and to that list we add the lives lost in the numerous deadly mass shootings that have occurred since the beginning of 2018. After the tragedy in Parkland, Florida where the lives of students and teachers were lost due to the lack of gun control legislation in our country, a revolution has begun. I quote a teacher from Stoneman Douglas who proposed this question to a member of the NRA, "In what way is an 18-year-old having the ability to acquire a military rifle considered well regulated?" After all the lives lost at Columbine, there should have been stronger gun control legislation passed, but with every choice comes consequences. When the government chose to not pass stronger gun control legislation to protect the lives of our citizens, the consequences were the lives of adults and children lost all over America. As Emma Gonzales, a student of Stoneman Douglas, said in her moving speech, "The guns have changed, but the laws have not."

I stand here on behalf of the students across the nation to ask you, How many children have to not return home from school for it to matter? How many teachers and children need to be murdered for the government to start to care? Well, the liberated students of Stoneman Douglas high school have demanded to be heard and have called for change. People have attempted to hush the youth into submission but, as the next generation of voters in this country, we refuse to back down. Our power lies in our unity and our willpower to push for change. It may not come quickly, but the way it will affect our nation is beyond what anyone thinks the youth are capable of. This revolution is an opportunity for students all over the country to participate in something larger than themselves. We have the ability to change the safety not only of schools across the nation, but safety across the nation as a whole. As a young American citizen, as a daughter, as a colleague, as an activist, and as a student, I ask you to get involved and take part in this revolution. United we stand, divided we fall. Never again.

11th gr Student at The Renaissance Charter School

Statement by Nicolas Cortez Alvarez

Good Afternoon.

People cried out after Columbine, people cried out after Sandy Hook, people cried out after Parkland, and we will continue to cry out till the destruction of young people ends. I have had the privilege of not being directly affected by gun violence, but I am sick and tired of seeing people suffer over easily preventable events. The actions of the students in Parkland have brought a new wave of empowerment to young people, and the conversation around federal gun control has been pushed to the forefront of national media and conversation. These "children" are making efforts to protect not only themselves but the adults around them, as well as all future students, while taking into consideration the nation's gun culture and deep corruption by extreme lobbyist groups whose leadership has manipulated gun laws for decades.

What does this mean for New York State?

With 8.5 million residents, New York City is one of the most densely populated cities in the country. However, while New York City has strict gun laws, these don't protect the more than 10 million New York State residents who live outside the city. In fact, most of the seniors in my class applied to and will be attending colleges in New York State. Many people in the country view the epidemic of school shootings from the perspective that we should fight fire with fire, and arm our educators. However, I believe this simply creates more room for violence rather than preventing mass shootings from ever happening again.

School is a safe haven for many, a place that provides food, emotional support, escape from issues at home. I have had the extreme privilege of attending a school that has allowed me to grow and express my authentic self, and has provided me with a stable stream of support. However many are not as lucky, and this is why I want both our state government and our federal government to make schools safe, not through arming our educators but through providing highly trained social workers who can help prevent individuals from feeling the need to hurt themselves or others.

We cannot continue to run in circles, and I understand that our current administration has made the process of creating progressive policy more difficult than ever. But I believe that many in Congress agree with me and many students around the nation when we cry out that we don't want this to happen again. We don't need more "thoughts and prayers." What we need is action, and we need it now. We cannot continue to minimize and criminalize our youth. We need legislation to be comprehensive, inclusive, clear, and uncorrupted, and we need it now.

12th gr student at The Renaissance Charter School