



EL PASO COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT

June 8, 2022

Dear Governor Abbott:

On behalf of the El Paso County Commissioners Court, I write this letter to urge you to call an emergency special legislative session to address the gun epidemic that has plagued our state for far too long. As you know, the community that we represent was forever changed when a gunman took the lives of 23 beautiful souls and injured 27 others at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas on August 3, 2019. As a result of the shooting, you formed a Texas Safety Commission to identify strategies that would help prevent these type of mass shootings from happening again. Subsequently, the legislature failed to pass meaningful gun violence prevention measures. In light of the recent mass shooting, we ask that you convene the Legislature in order to take action before the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year. We ask this on behalf of the children that will be returning to an environment that will undoubtedly provoke anxiety and concern given the recent tragedy.

The loss of 19 innocent children and two brave teachers in Uvalde, Texas has shaken us to the core. How did we let this happen? The State of Texas has made it incredibly easy for any 18-year-old to legally purchase two AR-15 style semi-automatic rifles and ammunition designed to kill people quickly by the masses with no permit process, assessment or training. We must take action and implement common sense gun safety measures in Texas. This is not a call to take away the right to bear arms from law-abiding Texans, but to ban weapons of war that should not be allowed for civilian use. Instead of taking proactive action to prevent such tragedies, the legislature has done quite the opposite by instituting "permit-less carry" as a state law in 2021. Many have argued that it is not the gun, but the person who is ultimately at fault, however, state lawmakers have made it too easy for anyone, regardless of potential risk of harming themselves or others, to buy a gun. We have a process for just about everything in the United States which includes registering to vote, getting a driver's license, and we even have to get a license to fish. Why do we not have safety measures in place for firearms? We can no longer condone or legitimize gun violence. We call on the State Legislature to come to the table and pass common sense safety measures. Many more innocent lives hang in the balance of your decision and leadership.

There are several common sense safety measures already proposed including, but not limited to:

- Raising the Age to buy an Assault Rifle to 21 years
- Risk Protective Order Laws
- Universal Background Checks on Firearm Sales
- Closing the Gun Show Loophole
- Require Training and a License to Carry Firearms

We support each one of these measures, and hope that you will convene a special session to consider them. Public hearings must be held where Texans can make their voices heard and legislators can take appropriate action before the next school year. To show our resolve with respect toward gun safety measures and the involvement in the community, we are grateful to Senator Cesar Blanco, Senior Representative Joe Moody and the rest of the State Delegation for hosting a “Safe Texas Town Hall Meeting”. Myself, our Mayor, School Superintendents, and Region 19 representatives, along with a variety of community members from both parties showed overwhelming support for what we have outlined in this letter. We understand that preventing gun violence is a complex issue that includes offering more access to educational and mental wellbeing programs, the collateral impact of the improper use of social media, as well as other existing societal challenges that play a role in these acts of violence.

As we approach the 3rd anniversary of the devastating August 3rd tragedy, we sympathize with the pain and loss that took place in both Buffalo, New York, and Uvalde, Texas. We cannot allow ourselves to become desensitized to gun violence in our state or in our country and must work in solidarity to create a better future for ourselves and generations to come. If we fail to take action, we are failing those who elected us to lead in the most critical times. We will not allow these victims to die in vain knowing that their lives did not prompt us to make transformational changes. Again, we ask that you call an emergency special session to help institute common sense gun safety measures. Time is of the essence.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ricardo A. Samaniego".

Ricardo A. Samaniego
El Paso County Judge