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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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March 16, 2016

Dr. Tom Frieden
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Director Frieden:

I write today to request information regarding the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) support for scientific research into the causes and prevention of gun violence.

As the largest collection of public health professionals conducting scientific research for injury prevention in the world, the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (Injury Center) has a mission to prevent violence and injuries, and reduce their consequences. Using a public health approach of defining problems, identifying risk factors, and testing prevention strategies, the Injury Center has been at the forefront of identifying scientifically sound solutions to reducing injuries and saving lives.

In the 1990s, the Injury Center played an important role in conducting high-quality, peer-reviewed research into the underlying causes of gun violence. But this changed starting in 1996 when Congress began inserting language into annual spending bills prohibiting the CDC from spending its funds "to advocate or promote gun control."¹ While this language—sponsored by then Representative Jay Dickey—only prohibits the use of funds to support legislative efforts to limit access to firearms, it has often been misconstrued to ban any and all scientific research on gun violence.

As a result, public health researchers at the CDC and other federal agencies have been discouraged from conducting scientific research on gun violence. Although the CDC self-directs a portion of its nearly \$6.2 billion annual budget to a wide variety of intra- and extramural research, the CDC has been reluctant to devote funding to gun violence research without a specific appropriation from Congress. Scientists at the CDC have expressed frustration with their inability to conduct more extensive studies on gun violence, which could help to reduce the over 30,000 Americans killed by gun violence each year.²

¹ P.L. 104-208, 110 Stat. 3009-244 (Sep. 30, 1996).

² Jess Bidgood, *When Gun Violence Felt Like a Disease, a City in Delaware Turned to the C.D.C.*, NEW YORK TIMES (Dec. 24, 2015).

Encouragingly, recent developments at the CDC have shown that your agency has the ability do more to assist communities that struggle with gun violence.

In my home town of Wilmington, Delaware, the CDC conducted an investigation into elevated levels of gun violence after receiving a request from Wilmington officials and Delaware's Department of Health and Social Services. Released in December 2015, the results of this investigation identified many of the root causes of gun violence in the community and offered recommendations on how prevention and early intervention could reduce violence for those most at risk.³ In February 2013, the CDC also released the results of an investigation of youth suicide clusters in Delaware's Kent and Sussex counties, finding that 45 percent of suicides between January 2009 and May 2012 were committed using firearms.

I am optimistic that Delaware can benefit from the CDC's work and believe that many other communities across the United States could also benefit from similar scientific research, as well. In a Washington Post op-ed with the Injury Center's former director Mark Rosenberg, Representative Dickey came out in support of additional research, writing that: "...[W]e are in strong agreement now that scientific research should be conducted into preventing firearm injuries and that ways to prevent firearm deaths can be found without encroaching on the rights of legitimate gun owners. The same evidence-based approach that is saving millions of lives from motor-vehicle crashes, as well as from smoking, cancer and HIV/AIDS, can help reduce the toll of deaths and injuries from gun violence."⁴

As a supporter of the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution, I believe that law-abiding citizens have the right to buy and own firearms. I also believe that we can take common sense steps to reduce gun violence. With more than 117,000 Americans injured or killed each year with firearms, conducting scientific research on gun violence is one such step.⁵

Enclosed with this letter is a set of questions and requests for information for your response. I ask that you please respond by April 15, 2016. The Committee's minority staff is authorized to conduct this investigation under the authority of Senate Rule XXV and Senate Resolution 73 (114th Congress). If you or members of your staff have any questions about this request, please feel free to contact Kevin Burris at (202) 224-2627. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

³ Steven Sumner, et. al, *Elevated Rates of Urban Firearm Violence and Opportunities for Prevention—Wilmington, Delaware*, Division of Violence Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Nov. 3, 2015).

⁴ Jay Dickey and Mark Rosenberg, *How to Protect Gun Rights While Reducing the Toll of Gun Violence*, WASHINGTON POST (Dec. 25, 2015).

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS), *Fatal and Nonfatal Injury Reports* (2013).

With best personal regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas R. Carper". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Member

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman

Questions for Dr. Tom Frieden
Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1. Please describe the CDC's policy toward scientific research into the causes and prevention of gun violence.
2. Has the CDC or the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the General Counsel conducted any analysis of the Dickey Amendment, including the types of gun violence research that are still permissible? If so, please provide this analysis.
3. In the aftermath of the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012, President Obama issued a memorandum directing the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Director of the CDC and other agencies within HHS, to conduct or sponsor research into the causes of gun violence and the ways to prevent it.⁶ Please describe the efforts CDC has taken in response to this memorandum.
4. In April 2013, the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control asked the Institute of Medicine to recommend a research agenda on the public health aspects of firearm-related violence.⁷ Please describe the actions the CDC plans to take in response to the findings of the Institute of Medicine report issued in June 2013.
5. From 1996 to the present, please describe notable examples of research conducted or funded by the CDC, including research by or through the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, related to understanding gun violence. Please also provide all instances when the CDC included requests for gun violence research in its research proposal solicitation materials.
6. For each year from FY1996 to FY2015, what portion of the CDC's budget, including the budget of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, has been devoted to gun violence research?
7. Each year, CDC's Division of Violence Prevention solicits investigator-initiated research via an "R01" Grant Program Announcement. The language in these announcements signals to grant-seeking public health researchers the research priorities of the CDC and its Division of Violence Prevention. Please describe any Division of Violence Prevention's R01 Grant Program Announcements related to gun violence research put forward from 1996 to the present.

⁶ Presidential Memorandum – Engaging in Public Health Research on the Causes and Prevention of Gun Violence (Jan. 16, 2013).

⁷ *New Report Identifies Research Priorities for Most Pressing Gun Violence Problems in U.S.*, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (June 5, 2013).

8. The National Violent Death Reporting System collects and combines data from multiple sources to provide states and communities with a more complete record of the circumstances surrounding violent deaths. Participation from all 50 states would significantly increase the amount of data available to the National Violent Death Reporting System and, thereby, improve its effectiveness. In how many states has the National Violent Death Reporting System been implemented? How many states have applied to be included in this system? What circumstances have prevented all state applicants from being added to the National Violent Death Reporting System?
9. Has the CDC previously entered into any agreements with the National Rifle Association offering to provide advanced notice of any publication on the subject of gun violence? If so, please provide a description of any such agreements as well as communications and documents memorializing the agreements.
10. From 1996 to the present, has the CDC instructed any employee or researcher to not conduct scientific research on gun violence? Has the CDC instructed any employees or researchers to re-write reports submitted for publication to avoid using any variation of the word "gun"?
11. What remedies are available to CDC researchers who believe their scientific research has been inappropriately suppressed or discouraged? Please describe any review or appeals processes and include a list of the offices or review boards who would address any such concerns.