

Mana Jacoby, Lydia Rosenthal, and Emma Silber
L'Taken Speech 2018
Temple Beth Am
Seattle, Washington

Hello, my name is Emma Silber, and we are from Temple Beth Am, in Seattle, Washington. Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with us today. We are here in the capitol to represent the Religious Action Center and the Reform Jewish movement, whose 900 congregations represent 1.5 million Jews across the country. Along with Mana Jacoby and Lydia Rosenthal, I would like to introduce the first topic that we are here to discuss with you - the Background Check Completion Act, S.1923, and its contribution to solving the gun violence epidemic.

8...500...100,000,000,000...8 is the number of Americans under the age of 19 who are killed each day from gun violence, 500x is the increased likelihood that a victim of domestic abuse will be killed by their abuser if there is a gun accessible, 100 billion is the approximate cost of medical and social finances for the country **concerning gun usage and violence**. This level of firearm usage is unheard of in the other developed countries of the world. The citizens of the United States, including **your** constituents, are rallying to create common-sense gun legislation that would prevent dangerous individuals from gaining access to firearms. In reference to a study done by the Pew Research Center, 89% of the public were in favor of expanding background checks to private gun sales and sales at gun shows. A specific bill introduced last year by Senator Blumenthal and Representative Clyburn entitled the Background Check Completion Act targets a loophole in the federal background check system in which the gun dealer is allowed to sell a gun to a buyer whose background check has not been completed... if the background check has taken longer than three business days. Often referred to as the Charleston loophole, this particular bill stems

from the obtaining of a pistol in Charleston, South Carolina in June of 2015 by a young man whose background check took longer than the allotted 72 hours and was subsequently sold a pistol even though he had an earlier drug arrest that was not found in the system that would have prevented him from passing the background check. He used that same pistol to kill 8 African American worshipers in a Charleston church. The FBI explored this piece of legislation and determined that a gun purchaser whose background check takes more than 24 hours is nearly 20 times more likely to be prohibited from buying a firearm than the average gun buyer.

Often it is easy to look at numbers without learning about the stories of the people affected by the lack of legislation surrounding this issue. My story starts on October 27th, 2017. An acquaintance known through some closer friends fell victim to gun violence in an event that continues to personally impact me to this day. Haben Fesseha was only 23 when he was shot fatally in the chest near Brooklyn Avenue NE and NE 42nd street close to the University of Washington campus. The person who fatally shot Haben was never found and could still be on the streets. I had never thought that I would ever personally know someone who would fall victim to gun violence. Losing someone to gun violence was a sudden and jarring experience. Hearing the news was so shocking that at first I had no emotions at all. Then a few minutes later, it hit me all at once. Thoughts flooded my mind: "I could have been there and maybe I could have done something to prevent it" or "this could have been me". I had never realized before that an experience with gun violence leaves friends and family feeling guilty for the victim's death. I feel as if this senseless act of violence could have been easily prevented by stricter laws surrounding handguns such as background check policies to prevent illegal gun sales between unlicensed dealers and

unlawful recipients which results in a multitude of handguns ending up on the streets. The reality is that 53% of all homicides are committed using handguns because they are very concealable and easy to obtain illegally. Countless people across the country, in many different cities have experienced loss and tragedy similar to my own, due to the flaws in the current legislation surrounding the issue.

We, as members of the Jewish faith, feel strongly that our religious values impel us to advocate on behalf of those whose voices have been silenced through mindless, preventable violence. In the book Leviticus, we are commanded to not “stand idly by while our neighbor’s blood is shed.” Jews are taught that human life is sacred, and that we must not sit in complacent silence, letting easily fixable problems, such as the 72-hour loophole, make it easier for criminals to harm our friends and neighbors. Our Mishnah also tells us that “he who takes one life it as though he has destroyed the universe and he who saves one life, it is as though he has saved the universe.” Through responsible, conscientious legislation we can save not only one life, but create a better society for all Americans, making our country an example to the world. As Jews and as Americans, we feel it is simply unacceptable that 8 children die from gun violence every day. It is anathema to our religious and moral values. We hope that by sharing our Jewish perspective with you, and reaffirming our community’s commitment to background check reform, the Senator would feel empowered to continue her fight.

- We would like to thank Senator Murray for her continued, unfailing support through cosponsoring the Background Check Completion Act, which seeks to close the Charleston loophole and ensure that those who are purchasing firearms have

passed a federal background check. Her vigor and energy makes us proud as Washington Jews.

- We would like to thank Senator Cantwell for her strong advocacy in support of the Background Check Completion Act, which would close the Charleston loophole. We would urge her to cosponsor the bill to demonstrate even further her commitment to reforming gun laws, a commitment that we are grateful to have witnessed as Washingtonians.

Thank you so much for your time, we admire and thank the Senator for her untiring fight for the people of Washington, and the Jewish community, and we hope that the urgent issue of gun violence will be present in her mind as she continues to represent her constituents on the floor.