

Ottawa, August 2nd, 2018

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons,
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Canada's New Democrats
Nouveau Parti Démocratique du Canada

300-279 AVENUE LAURIER AVENUE WEST/OUEST
OTTAWA, ONTARIO, CANADA K1P 5J9

PHONE // TÉLÉPHONE 613-236-3613
FAX // TÉLÉCOPIEUR 613-230-9950
TOLL-FREE // SANS FRAIS 1-866-525-2555

NDP.ca // NPD.ca

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

I am writing to ask your government to take concrete and urgent action to help end the loss of life and injuries being caused by gun violence in Canadian cities. We are all grateful to the first responders who put themselves at risk rushing to these scenes to save lives.

We know the root causes for violence in our communities – they include poverty, racial discrimination, huge gaps in mental health services, lack of adequate and affordable housing and the lack of meaningful, good quality job opportunities for young people. These factors mean marginalized communities are most vulnerable to the impacts of gang violence.

Any credible crime prevention strategy must include strategies for reducing poverty, fighting racism, breaking down the stigma associated with mental health and addressing other social determinants of violence in our communities. We also need police authorities at the table working constructively with and responding to the needs of these marginalized communities.

In the past, a host of measures have been implemented after being sold as ‘common-sense’ solutions to increase public safety including, street checks and carding, mandatory minimum sentencing and increases in the number and variety of weapons police carry. But these measures have only eroded public confidence in our police forces, increased and legitimized racial profiling, and fed inequality in our justice system.

Instead of significantly reducing crime and violence, these measures have amplified suspicion and distrust between the police, racialized communities, Indigenous peoples, and those struggling with mental health issues. They've also helped perpetuate overly-simplistic and dangerous ideas of who is and who isn't a criminal. It is therefore very understandable that some communities don't see calls for more policing as promise of security, but as a threat to their safety.

I can say from personal experience that when individuals and communities feel they don't belong, they can feel pushed to the margins and harder to reach. When young people do not see anyone speaking to them and their experiences they turn away. When parents see things getting worse and worse they don't embrace additional government action, they fear it.

Prime Minister, we must strike a new path, one that engages all communities in a united effort to tackle gun violence at its roots. We must replace simplistic solutions with comprehensive, well-informed strategies built out of partnership with those most affected. This is crucial for any effort to alleviate poverty, confront discrimination, expand mental health services and ensure everyone has an affordable place to live and opportunities to strive for.

The primary reason I'm writing to you today is to ask for your commitment to develop long-term and effective solutions to the root causes of gun violence by partnering with the communities affected. That is the only way we can truly tackle the issue of gun violence.

Additionally, there are some steps you can take in the short-term to address the symptoms of the larger causes.

First, the federal government must play more effective leadership role on gun control, holistic coordination between law enforcement and interdiction efforts across the country and all levels of government, and on a wide range of health and prevention programs. While the NDP supported your government's announcement of funding for initiatives to tackle gang and gun violence in the 2017 Federal Budget, the vast majority

of that funding is back-loaded. Given the current spike in gun violence I urge your government to fast track that program to reach \$100 million a year by 2019, three years earlier than is your current plan. Furthermore, your government should use those funds to prioritize prevention and youth-focused initiatives, specifically youth gang, youth bullying and cyberbullying community based programs.

Second, your government must address the availability of guns in our cities by taking steps to immediately allow municipalities to ban handguns. Half of all firearms involved in gun crime originate from legal domestic sources. These guns are then stolen or sold illegally and end up on our streets. The federal government should not stand in the way of municipal leaders who know their communities best, and want to ban these weapons to keep their residents safe.

Third, I am calling on your government to immediately devote more focused resources to allow the Canada Border Services Agency to stem the illegal import of firearms from the United States. The CBSA is already severely under-resourced and is facing new challenges. We need to give them the tools they need to effectively coordinate with law enforcement to stop cross-border weapons smuggling.

Finally, I call on your government to strongly condemn any and all hate crimes and racist confrontations emerging because of misinformed reactions to the gun violence. This is a time to support all efforts, especially the efforts of those in communities like the Danforth, which have responded to the worst of the violence with love, acceptance, and the courage to bring people together.

That strength should be exemplified in the Canadian government's response to gun violence in our communities.

Sincerely,



Jagmeet Singh
Leader of the New Democratic Party