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April 17, 2013

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid,

On behalf of the American Nurses Association (ANA), the only full-service professional organization representing the interests of the nation's 3.1 million Registered Nurses, I urge you to support S. 649 "Safe Communities, Safe Schools Act." ANA is deeply concerned over the continued gun violence perpetrated in this country every day. The tragic events that took the lives of 26 innocent men, women and children at Sandy Hook elementary school in Connecticut serve as a reminder of the continuing problem of dealing with both mental illness and relatively easy access to weapons in our country. There are no easy answers or quick-fixes to these problems, however, we believe that S. 649 will tighten existing gun trafficking laws while proposing some common-sense changes such as requiring universal background checks for all firearm purchase and removing the loophole for gun shows.

As the largest provider of healthcare services in this country, nurses are uniquely positioned to witness first-hand the devastating impact of gun violence. Gunshot victims make up a sizeable number of patients in many of our country's urban emergency rooms. While ANA fully respects the Second Amendment and a citizen's right to bear arms, we also know that some sensible steps can be taken to both protect the rights provided to us in the Constitution and tighten laws to help curb the ready access to assault weapons in this country.

ANA believes taking steps like closing the "gun show" loophole, strengthening penalties for gun trafficking and instituting a mandatory background check for anyone looking to purchase a gun will help to cut down the easy access to guns on our streets. We recognize that guns purchased legally have been, and will continue to be, used in violent crimes but we believe that adding these reasonable steps will make it harder for those who commit these crimes to access them. Many of these proposed changes are supported by the majority of Americans, including many responsible gun owners themselves.

Any serious attempt to take on the issue of gun violence must also address the state of mental health in our country. For too long we have turned a blind eye to those suffering from mental illness. From its sheer stigma, to a lack of education and funding, many of those suffering from mental illnesses slip through the cracks and don't receive the proper care they need and deserve. ANA urges Congress to look at new ways to address these issues and renew a commitment to improving the mental health of the American people.

"The Safe Communities, Safe Schools Act" works to strengthen existing gun laws while looking to close some of the loopholes used to purchase firearms. ANA urges you to support the passage of this important legislation. Thank you again for consideration of our request and your leadership and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rose I. Gonzalez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rose" and last name "Gonzalez" clearly legible.

Rose Iris Gonzalez, PhD, MPS, RN
Director, Government Affairs