December 10, 2015

Honorable Paul Ryan  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives  
H-232 U.S. Capitol Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
H-204, U.S. Capitol Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan and Minority Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and our 25,000 members, I wish to express our strong support for lifting the ban on federal research related to gun violence, known as the Dickey Amendment. This nearly 20-year ban on the use of federal funds to conduct comprehensive scientific research about the effects of firearms ownership on public health and the causes of gun violence has tied the nation’s hands in terms of finding a solution to this serious public health epidemic.

Monday, December 14 marks the third anniversary of the horrific attacks at Sandy Hook Elementary School that took the lives of 20 children and 6 educators, including school psychologist Mary Sherlach. The only hope after this heartbreaking tragedy was that Congress would act to protect our citizens from the scourge of gun violence. Instead, in the three years since, the nation has suffered more than 1,000 mass shootings. This number does not include other gun homicides or gun suicide deaths, the latter of which account for more than two thirds of the 30,000 gun deaths in this country every year. Understandably, the majority of the public, and responsible gun owners, want to see policies that reduce gun violence.

School psychologists are science-based practitioners who understand and uphold the irreplaceable role that research plays in solving serious problems. Data-based decision making, not politics, must inform our public health strategies and related public policies. NASP’s primary focus is on children and youth and the threat that both exposure to gun violence and inappropriate access to guns poses to their well-being and safety. While gun violence in schools is rare, it is undeniable that the ongoing prevalence of gun violence in our communities, neighborhoods, houses of worship, retail spaces, and workplaces risks a serious deleterious effect on our children and youth.

The majority of youth who are murdered are killed with a firearm, nearly half of youth suicide deaths involve the use of a gun, and research shows that exposure to gun violence undermines children and youths’ social, emotional and academic wellbeing. It is imperative that our federal leaders bring every possible resource to bear in addressing this public health crisis. Federal safety and health agencies must be empowered to conduct comprehensive research into the causes of and solutions to this unacceptable source of harm to our children, families, and communities.

NASP joins the majority of educators, physicians, public health experts, researchers, scientists, federal lawmakers, and even former Representative Jay Dickey who lent his name to the original amendment, in calling on Congress to eliminate the ban in the upcoming omnibus budget bill. Doing so is a vital first step in ending the threat to the American people posed by this unnecessary public health epidemic.
I urge you to support efforts to remove this ban and show that our nation is committed to finding solutions to gun violence that are rooted in scientific data. If you have any questions, or would like to speak further, please contact Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach, NASP Director of Government Relations (kvaillancourt@naspweb.org).

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Susan Gorin, CAE
Executive Director

cc: House of Representatives