

Statement from Dean Kilpatrick, PhD, Director, NMVVRRC

Thoughts and Prayers are not Enough

Within the last month, three major mass violence incidents occurred in Gilroy, California, El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio. At least 34 people were killed, and another 63 were injured. Hundreds of their family members and friends were vicariously traumatized by the death or injury of their loved ones. Thousands of others escaped injury or death but were left terrified by their brush with violent death. Three more communities joined the ever growing list of cities and towns whose names are now synonymous with mass violence. Millions of Americans were reminded once again how difficult it is to feel safe from mass violence when going about their daily lives. Old debates reignited about the causes of mass violence including the role of mental illness, access to firearms, hate, and extremist ideology. A variety of policy changes were proposed to reduce mass violence. Statements were issued saying that the victims and survivors were in our thoughts and prayers. Little if anything has yet been done to reduce mass violence, partially because it is a complex problem that is extremely difficult to prevent. Every time a new mass violence incident happens, this cycle is repeated. It is reminiscent of the movie "Groundhog Day" in which the character played by Bill Murray is condemned to relive the same day over and over no matter how he attempts to change what happens.

Without diminishing the importance of thoughts and prayers, they alone have not been sufficient to diminish the risk of mass violence or to meet the needs of those affected by mass violence. We can and should do more. In the past, our nation has been capable of addressing big problems even when they are complicated, controversial, and expensive. Preventing mass violence is a big, complicated, controversial, expensive problem, but there are things we could do as a nation that would help that have substantial support from a majority of the population. Improving services for those affected by mass violence is also a big problem that requires research, planning, coordination, and adequate resources to achieve. Improving services should not be controversial, and we as a nation can and should do better in addressing this big problem.

Our mission at the NMVVRRC does not include prevention of mass violence, but we recognize the terrible toll it is taking on our nation and urge our nation to move beyond holding victims in our thoughts and prayers by actually taking thoughtful steps to reduce mass violence. Freedom from fear of mass violence is a worthy national goal. Until that is accomplished, there will be more mass violence incidents and victims. We at the NMVVRRC will be doing our part to assist victims and survivors in every way possible and make sure that they have access to the best services possible.