

ALBANY CALIFORNIA



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MAYOR'S STATEMENT

GUN VIOLENCE AND RESIDUAL TRAUMA

I write this message as my final Mayor's Statement with a heavy heart. I had originally endeavored to issue a final Mayor's Statement that acknowledged all the amazing residents of Albany for challenging me to lead our city with integrity and compassion. However, due to the recent wave of high-profile shooting incidents, it is imperative I acknowledge the latter. I have historically strayed from publicly giving attention to suspects in such shootings, and have always placed an emphasis on the victims, families, and friends. While we continually witness these traumatic events, it leaves many of us questioning how to put an end to these senseless moments of gun violence. Policy and robust support can only extend so long in the consciousness of our American society. We need innovative and creative approaches, investment in research and education, and enhanced regulation on how guns are entering the hands of those with deadly motives. I don't claim to have all the answers, nor claim that sweeping gun control laws will awake the giant of social accountability. Yet, we as a society need to explore better options than the current status quo.

As someone who has experienced a litany of situations encountering gun violence, I can offer first-hand perspective that the trauma is real and the impacts seldom dissipate. From staring down the barrel, knowing my existence depended on the decision being made by another human, to narrowly avoiding being sprayed with bullets after an individual's gun had locked up while he sprayed a car full of occupants next to me, to being under lock down in high school and college, to several other first-hand encounters where I survived. This shouldn't be anyone's normalcy. Yet, it is. It's carried over to one of my nephews barely avoiding gunfire after a high school football game. It's carried over to my wife's family home being littered with bullets and another nephew barely avoiding losing his life as a baby - due to shooters misidentifying the wrong house. It's carried over to my father-in-law being pistol-whipped while tending to landscaping in his front yard. It's carried over to an individual coming up to my front door at University Village with a gun, as I held my newborn son. It's carried over to youth recklessly making comments on social media with threatening language to bring harm to our communities. It's carried over into a wave that

never seems to let up. From the mass shooting in Stockton, to the incidents this past weekend at Brown University, to the international stage of Bondi Beach fueled by what's assumed to be hate towards Jewish people, to the killing of a local hero, Coach John Beam, in Oakland. These moments of gun violence have become so common, that we sometimes lose sight of the other incidents, while the names of victims simply become rendered as a footnote of gun violence. I challenge us all to remember and say their names as we do for so many others like Ahmaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin, Breonna Taylor, and many others. I reflect on the many family and friends I've lost due to gun violence - both targeted and random - and how these are names that deserve to be spoken and remembered. Not for political commentary or political scoring points - but for the intentionality of demonstrating human integrity and compassion. For me, this includes Brandon Quintana, Harold Scoggins, Anthony Lamont Davis, Demario Lee, Alfred Hill, Julio Castro Medina, among many others. I challenge us to also remember the names of those who helped to minimize the impact of gun violence (sometimes making the ultimate sacrifice) - from law enforcement officials like Leonard Garcia of Richmond, California who lost his life responding to a domestic violence call; to my former football coach Olajuwon Thornton who was a protector for many of us and whom I witnessed disarm an individual in high school; to Ahmed al-Ahmed, a son of refugees, who wrestled a gun away from one of the Bondi Beach attackers; to countless moments of intervention by so many not named.

I write this statement not to make a political statement or spectacle of recent events at Brown University, Bondi Beach, or other locations nearby. I write this statement, to remind us all that we need to hug those close to us at all times and remind each other that we are always loved. Some of us are grieving; some are confronting traumas; some are directly impacted; some are trying to heal. I write this statement, to remind us to keep aware of any potential signs of gun violence and report it to proper authorities. The residual impact of gun violence should not be a fabric of American culture and society. Yet, it is. None of us are insulated from the reckoning with the realities of gun violence - whether random, targeted or anything in between.

Fortunately, in our community we have a progressive department of public safety officials who have been critically impactful in quietly getting guns off the streets and keeping our beautiful city safe. And thankfully, we have a small community full of people, with big hearts to be present for each other.

If you have been impacted in any way by gun violence - whether recent or in the past - know that you are not alone in navigating life as a direct or indirect survivor. And if nobody has told you it yet today - you are loved, valued, and appreciated.

My heart goes out to all victims and their families and friends.

Little city, Big Heart!