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East High School shooting March 22 exemplifies trauma inflicted on community with youth access to firearms

Denver, Colo., March 27, 2023—For Immediate Release—On the second year of remembrance of the mass shooting at the Boulder King Soopers, which killed 10 people, widow Ellen Mahoney was preparing to testify at Colorado's capitol. Also testifying the same day, seven hours after lockdown, was East High School student Alexander Cisneros. About a mile away, Denver East High School student Austin Lyle, 17, entered school after 9 a.m., and during a scuffle when a handgun was found in his possession, two administrators were wounded, one seriously, when Lyle allegedly shot them. Lyle fled, and his body was later found near Bailey, Colo., dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Cisneros and Mahoney mustered the courage and emotional fortitude to debate their gun violence prevention positions after each marked a traumatic day in their lives.

The gun recovered was a ghost gun, an unserialized weapon, which is easily assembled from a kit. The recovery of ghost guns at crime scenes has increased 1000% in the last 5 years. Because purchase of these kits can skirt background checks, they are a perfect means for youth and other prohibited individuals to acquire arms.

For the third time in less than a year, and twice in one month, Denver's East High School has had a shooting. Last month, one student, Luis Garcia, was shot in his car just off-campus and later died from his wounds. Two youth are suspects in that shooting. [East High parents confronted](#) Denver Police Chief Ron Thomas and Denver Mayor Michael Hancock about how they will stop gun violence in Denver Public Schools.

"We currently have 8 bills in the Colorado legislature, including ones addressing the age of gun purchase and expansion of petitioners of the existing ERPO (Red Flag) law. All are intended to prevent inappropriate access to firearms, to keep our children and communities safe as they pursue 'life, liberty, and happiness,' said Eileen McCarron, a co-founder of Colorado Ceasefire, the state's oldest gun violence prevention organization, established 23 years ago, a year after the Columbine High School massacre.

Denverite/Colorado Public Radio reported [that Lyle had been arrested a year ago in Aurora for possession of a silencer](#), a large capacity magazine and an AR15-style ghost gun. Silencers require a special license, large capacity magazines are illegal in Colorado, and Lyle was too young to have legally purchased the assault weapon.

The violence at East High School, and so many other places in hundreds of killings, are PREVENTABLE. "Access to firearms by children, unsafe gun storage, illegal sale and possession are all preventable when responsible adults, gun owners, and dealers take action and follow the law. We are angry, parents are angry, our youth are angry. We want to live and learn in peace. Anytime there is a youth illegally in possession of a gun, there is an adult who was irresponsible or criminal. We need to crack down on these adults who are aiding and abetting youth gun violence," McCarron said.

As more than 2,000 East High School families reflect on the trauma of March 22, grateful that their children are home and safe, all wonder what will come next. One change is that when students return from Spring Break the first week of April, high schools in the Denver Public School district will have School Resource Officers (SROs) on campus—a reversal of policy. But clearly, more needs to be done to address youth violence, youth mental and behavioral health, and especially youth access to firearms.

—More—

Colorado Ceasefire Legislative Action has been working tirelessly to strengthen Colorado's gun laws to save lives. This year, one focus has been on keeping guns away from those who should not have them, especially youth.

"Our schools and communities won't really be safe until unscrupulous people quit selling guns, including ghost guns or their kits, to youth. Additionally, gun owners must responsibly and regularly lock up their firearms. A good portion of gun thefts are from vehicles. Leaving an unlocked gun in a car or truck can lead to the loss of an innocent person's life. Having a lethal weapon in one's possession entails a public health and safety responsibility. Gun owners **MUST** treat it that way," McCarron concluded.

Editor's Note

The *Denver Post* Editorial Board endorsed, on Sunday, March 26, 2023, five gun violence prevention bills which Colorado Ceasefire has worked on: SB23-168/169/170 and HB23-1219/1230. Each addresses the complex elements of the March 22, 2023 shooting and the events leading to that day. In a rare Sunday session on March 26, SB23-168 and SB23-170 were approved by the Colorado House. However, before those bills go to Governor Jared Polis' desk, they will require concurrence and repassage by the Senate.

Colorado Ceasefire has been working for freedom from gun violence since 2000. Ceasefire initiated and was instrumental in the enactment of the 2013 Colorado firearms laws and began advocating for an Extreme Risk law in 2016, which became effective January 1, 2020. Ceasefire worked closely with members of Colorado's General Assembly to enact six gun reform measures in 2021.

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