

## NEWS RELEASE

### Survivors Empowered Presents The Gun Violence State of the Union

- Event spotlights gun deaths as the #1 killer of teens and kids in the US
- First-ever “Badge of Dishonor” recipient to be announced

San Diego, CA—March 6, 2024—Underscoring gun deaths as the number one killer of our kids, Survivors Empowered will host a national press conference entitled “*Survivors Empowered Presents The Gun Violence State of the Union*” at 1 PM PST on Saturday, March 9 at the Performing Arts Center & Multi-Purpose Room at Valencia Park/Malcolm X Library, 5148 Market St., San Diego, CA 92114. [Join remotely via Zoom](#) or [YouTube](#).

The event will address the importance of “*speaking the whole truth about gun violence*” in assessing the current state of federal gun laws and policies that impact gun violence survivors and charting a way forward to help children and teens—as well as adults—live.

Survivors Empowered is a nationally prominent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that supports and educates gun violence survivors.

Presenters include Survivors Empowered Founders Sandy and Lonnie Phillips, whose daughter, Jessi Redfield Ghawi, was killed in the 2012 Aurora, CO theater shootings; Giffords Guns & Democracy Attorney Fellow Jessica Ojeda; Survivors Empowered Executive Director Penny Okamoto; Survivors Empowered Board Member Max Coston, Founder at Safer California PAC and Principal at SP Strategies; Kristin Song, President at The Ethan Miller Song Foundation, and Devin Hughes, President and Founder of GVPedia.

Among the organizations and gun violence prevention proponents represented at the event will be San Diegans For Gun Violence Prevention.

Calling out those unwilling to speak or support the truth about gun violence, the event will unveil its first-ever “Badge of Dishonor” recipient—spotlighting a prominent politician or pro-shooting activist who has “obfuscated the dire state of US gun violence and misled the country about the immediate need for clear and compelling solutions,” according to Sandy Phillips. She adds, “We must take effective steps to educate the public about the truth of the impact of guns in our society. We must speak the whole truth about legislation, regulation, the financial burden on the US taxpayer, and, not least of all, the burden placed on a society that must consider every school day that some of our children might be fatally shot during a school shooting. To save lives, reduce crime, and create a society that can once again enjoy the freedoms of democracy, we must demand an end to the financial power that enables arms dealers and manufacturers to metaphorically pistol-whip legislatures into trading donations and votes for the lives of our children.”

Statistics about child and teen gun-related deaths are appalling and growing, especially around suicide. Numerous reports in the New York Times, US News & World Report, CNN, NBC, ABC, and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have cited 2020-2021 studies showing gun violence as the number one killer of US children and teens. Even more startling than those years, 2023 data continue to show increases in firearm-related deaths that spiked in part because of COVID.

### Truth-telling Topics to be addressed as part of Survivors Empowered Presents The Gun Violence State of the Union

**Speaking the whole truth about the deadly impact of gun violence on US children, teens, adults, and gun violence survivors**—including the high rates of gun suicide, and preventive measures (e.g., locking up guns securely in the home; educating healthcare workers to inform patients and families about increased risks of suicides/homicides when firearms are easily accessible).

**Speaking the whole truth about ways to bring justice to gun violence survivors** by repealing The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA)—the federal law that has shielded firearms manufacturers and dealers from legal accountability for decades; and holding the firearms industry accountable for inappropriate, incomplete, and misleading advertising or statements.

**Speaking the whole truth about the staggering financial costs of gun violence**—\$557 billion annually in gun violence-related costs borne in large part by US taxpayers, who deserve relief in a system that currently rewards sellers of firearms with high profits without legal accountability when their guns and ammunition are used to kill and injure people—as well as create carnage among gun violence survivors.

For example, [GunViolenceArchive.org](https://www.gunviolencearchive.org) reveals that suicide by firearm, a major killer of children and teens, went up from 23,941 in 2019 to 27,038 in 2022 (the last year for which data is available).

Lonnie Phillips emphasizes the importance of changing the conversation about gun violence so that constructive action replaces polarized and politicized rhetoric on both sides of the aisle. He points out, "I've never encountered anyone—pro-or-anti-gun control advocates alike—who thought that killing our kids and decimating the survivors left behind is okay. We are calling out individuals, organizations, and factions who clam up about speaking the whole truth--substituting narrow-minded and vitriolic views to perpetuate the problems."

Okamoto notes, "Often obscured in the gun violence equation is the devastating and widespread impact of youth suicide by gun. Key to reducing this scourge are two steps: Locking up guns in a safe location so kids can't get to them and preventing teens in crisis from buying guns that they turn on themselves."

**We must apply to firearms the same careful and strict attitudes we have toward alcohol use, tobacco use, cannabis use, and gambling.**

[survivorsempowered.org](https://survivorsempowered.org)

Resources to further study the devastating impact of gun violence and how gun violence survivors can reclaim their lives include:

- [Giffords' Annual Gun Law Scorecard](#)
- [Survivors Empowered](#) (gun violence survivorship and recovery)
- [Gun Violence Archive](#) (overall rates of death and injury, rates broken down by demographics and types--homicide, police shootings, unintentional, suicide, school shootings, mass shootings, domestic violence-related shootings, hospital shootings)
- [GVPedia's Database and DataViz](#) (research to arm policymakers, advocates, and the public with incontrovertible facts to create effective policies to reduce gun violence)
- [Denver Accord](#) (comprehensive plan to reduce gun violence)

For more information, contact Penny Okamoto: [penny@survivorsempowered.org](mailto:penny@survivorsempowered.org); 503-984-4152 cell/text; [www.survivorsempowered.org](https://www.survivorsempowered.org). Event information is available at: [survivorsempowered.org/gvsotu2024](https://survivorsempowered.org/gvsotu2024).

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### **About Survivors Empowered**

*Tragically, the 2012 Aurora, CO theater shooting death of Jessi Redfield Ghawi, daughter of Survivors Empowered founders Sandy and Lonnie Phillips, became the catalyst for the organization's existence. Survivors Empowered has become a nationally prominent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization directly supporting and educating gun violence survivors, including most notably the family and friends of shooting victims, as well as shooting survivors themselves. Resources include: Survivors Toolkit co-authored with Gabby Giffords, Trauma Therapy Resources, and Mindfulness Training. Mobile therapy retreats are planned for 2024. As Sandy and Lonnie learned firsthand, surviving family and friends need much help to navigate the new reality they face. [CNN and anchor Anderson Cooper have recognized Sandy and Lonnie Phillips/Survivors Empowered](#) as an uplifting community champion for empowering survivors of gun violence to move forward with their lives. Among other nationally-prominent media, Survivors Empowered has been covered by 60 Minutes, CNN, BBC, AP, and USA Today. Sandy and Lonnie Phillips have co-authored two books, including *Forgotten Survivors of Gun Violence: Wounded*. For more information, to get help, and to donate or buy books/merchandise, visit: [www.survivorsempowered.org](https://www.survivorsempowered.org).*

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