



## Senator Dan Blue: Opinion and Commentary

By Dan Blue, NC State Senator representing District 14

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I've lived in Raleigh's Hedingham community for over 30 years. It's where my wife and I raised our children. Our grandchildren play in the backyard and neighborhood streets.

Hedingham is like any neighborhood in any town in America. I never felt uneasy here, or worried about my family's safety on our streets.

But all of that has changed [since Oct. 13](#).

Even though 100 Americans die every day from gun violence, we never thought a mass shooting would happen here. We always think that it can't happen to us. But it can happen to us. It did happen to us. And Raleigh is forever changed.

Parents are hyper-alert; kids hesitate to ride their bikes on the streets. We are Buffalo, Parkland, Uvalde, Aurora, Orlando and Sandy Hook. The American ideal of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness collapses further with every news story.

I first ran for public office to help improve the quality of life for my neighbors, and give back to the state that has given so much to my family. Public servants are supposed to help people. That hasn't happened.

The N.C. General Assembly's failure to act on this growing epidemic has hurt people.

The Republican-majority legislature operates on its own timeline, and it's one I've never understood during my time in the minority.

Republicans reacted with lightning speed to the Charlotte City Council's non-discrimination ordinance. They acted swiftly to curtail Gov. Cooper's authority following his 2016 win. Their reaction to the Charleston church massacre was to hastily pass a law that would protect Confederate monuments in our state.

This legislature has a pattern of acting fast on issues that have no impact on public health and safety. So, I ask my colleagues: when is the right time to act on behalf of people who are scared, angry, and tired of grieving?

For as long as we have debated gun safety reforms, another crisis is growing: mental health care. This challenge has plagued us long before COVID-19, and it has only gotten worse.

Gun safety and mental health care reforms will take time to have a significant impact. But the longer we wait to act, the more people we risk losing to these epidemics.

Austin Thompson's parents said in a statement they never saw any warning signs their son was considering violence. I believe them. Often, families won't see the warning signs. Not because they aren't paying attention or don't care – because they're not mental health professionals trained to see these signs.

Just as we take our children to a pediatrician for annual check-ups to ensure their physical health, we also need someone to check on their mental health. Schools can help. It is just as important to get mental health professionals and social workers in every school as it is to get a teacher in every classroom.

Any educator will tell you that student success is comprehensive. A hungry kid, a sick kid, a depressed or anxious kid can't succeed in the classroom or in the world. In that respect, the state has failed our kids. It's estimated that 132,000 kids in our state have major depression; 74,000 of them aren't getting treatment. Calls for increased state funding for school mental health staff have been ignored by Republican lawmakers for years.

If we truly care about our neighbors and protecting their right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, then lawmakers need to take action.

*Dan Blue served in the N.C. House 1981-2002 and 2006-09, then in the N.C. Senate since 2009. He is Senate Minority Leader.*

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