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Armed Guards at Schools

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By: David Lampo - January 8, 2013

Americans' emotions are still raw over the massacre of 26 innocent lives at Sandy Hook. People are understandably searching for ways to prevent a recurrence, leading inevitably to calls for stricter gun control. But one of the most immediate and effective measures we could take would be to shore up school security by deploying police or armed security guards at every public school. Some are even suggesting that we arm designated school administrators and teachers, not only as deterrence but also as a means of self-defense in the event of other such attacks.

Unfortunately, the reaction of some pro-gun control advocates to these proposals has bordered on hysteria. Most people not only accept but expect armed security or police at banks and malls, government buildings and airports, national monuments and train stations, and yet the response to calls to provide that same sort of protection for the most vulnerable among us has provoked a firestorm of protest and vitriol. The anti-gun crowd argues that armed security and self-defense in schools are inappropriate, not only by teachers and school administrators but even by police, the very people we rely on in every other part of society to protect us and to prevent crime. According to some, apparently, police belong in our schools only after a school shooting has occurred, their job then merely to count the bodies and begin an investigation.

And yet previous mass shootings like Sandy Hook have shown that armed intervention against a shooter has actually stopped the killing and saved lives, something most of the anti-gun mainstream media and pro-gun control groups have simply ignored. According to criminologist David Kopel, there have been at least five instances of mass shooting during which armed citizens intervened to stop a shooter: Shoney's Restaurant in Anniston, Ala., in 1991; the high school in Pearl, Miss., in 1997; the middle-school dance in Edinboro, Pa., in 1998; the New Life Church in Colorado Springs in 2007; and just recently at the Clackamas Mall in Oregon, where a shopper who had a concealed carry permit drew his weapon and aimed it at a shooter who had already killed two people. The shooter then killed himself. If these citizens had not intervened as they did, before the police arrived, more people would have died, so it's inexplicable how some can put their anti-gun bias above saving lives — and yet they do.

In fact, these examples of self-defense are merely the tip of the iceberg of evidence that guns in the hands of the right people do save lives. Over the past 30 years or so, there have been at least a dozen major studies and surveys that have looked at the question of how many times per year guns are used to stop or prevent violent crime, and the results

of every one of them show that guns are used far more by police and law-abiding citizens to stop crime than by criminals to commit crime:

- A 1994 survey conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that Americans used guns almost half a million times per year to scare away intruders breaking into their homes.
- In 1995, criminology professor Gary Kleck published a study of defensive gun use in the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* that was praised for its methodology by anti-gun activist Marvin Wolfgang. It showed as many as 2.5 million defensive uses of guns each year by law-abiding citizens.
- In 1997, the National Institute of Justice under President Clinton released a study conducted by two anti-gun criminologists, Philip Cook and Jens Ludwig, which found that guns were used almost 1.5 million times annually for self-defense.
- In 2000, a study published in the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* found that civilians use guns nearly 990,000 times per year to defend themselves and others against crime.

The fact is that only a fraction of 1 percent of all guns is ever used for criminal purposes; the rest are used for sport, hunting and self-defense.

In light of what happened in Newtown, Gov. Bob McDonnell recently proposed a review of school security policies in Virginia schools, arguing that we should consider arming school personnel, possibly including some teachers, just as thousands of school districts across the country already do. While it would be wrong to force local school districts to adopt such a policy, as Del. Bob Marshall has proposed, the governor's proposal is one that all Virginians and the legislature should examine closely.

Trying to reduce the number of guns in our society, particularly the semi-automatic weapons often used in school shootings, is understandable, but it's akin to the search for the Holy Grail. Some new restrictions on these weapons might be worth considering, but even if eventually passed, they would be mostly symbolic, and the results hard to measure. Strengthening school security with well-trained and armed personnel, however, is a relatively quick and effective means of preventing or at least reducing both the number of shootings and the resulting casualties if indeed another one takes place. Gun-free zones, like schools, are an open invitation to potential shooters. It's time to even the odds by arming the good guys.