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January 14, 2013

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

The pediatricians in New York State were very proud to hear you, their Governor, deliver a clear, powerful and accurate description of stronger gun control measures to help keep the children and families of New York safer.

We were all devastated by the killings in Newtown, as we were in response to the deaths in Webster, Aurora, Arizona and on and on. We are the physicians whose job it is to keep children strong and healthy. We are the ones in emergency departments across the state when children with gunshot wounds that may or may not be lethal are brought in. We are the ones dealing with frightened children and frightened parents.

But we know we don't have to tell you the details. You know through your own state agencies' databases how many New York children we lose each year to gun violence. You know how many lives are cut short; how many families grieve the horrible loss of a child. You know as well as we do that we can and must do more to protect our children from guns.

We applaud your position to further define and refine the ban on assault weapons. We support your goal to reduce the number of bullets in a magazine. We agree that all guns and gun owners should be registered in a statewide/federal database. We strongly believe that gun licenses should be renewed regularly to ascertain continued ability to safely keep a firearm.

We also believe that more needs to be done to meet the mental health needs of children, adolescents and young adults. All New Yorkers in need of mental health services need to be identified and provided with evidenced based therapies that will help them move from illness to health.

But, as we congratulate you, and pledge to stand with you to get this done, we urge you to consider going even further. We would like to see New York require micro stamping of ammunition, require safe trigger locks on all guns, so that only the owner can fire the weapon, limit the number of hand guns any person can own, require that all families understand that if there is a gun in the house and there is ammunition in the house, children are not safe. Far reaching, we would welcome a ban on handguns, the weapon most often used in firearm-related injuries and deaths of children and adolescents.

Let's work together to help New Yorkers accept the fact the guns are lethal weapons that kill children. Work with us to create and implement a statewide public health campaign that asks parents to ask about guns in the homes of the children their children visit. Ask all physicians to ask their patients about guns in their homes. And support physicians in how to talk with people about how to create the safest possible storage options if they can't convince the family to move the guns out of the home.

Guns kill children in domestic violence disputes; they kill children in child on child gun accidents; they kill children in drive by shootings; they kill children as innocent bystanders in crimes with guns, and they kill children in massacres. Guns kill children. That is a fact. And when we have too many guns, too many children get killed.

As pediatricians, we believe that losing even one child's life is a tragedy. But in the last few years we have stood by and watched hundreds of our children be killed in senseless gun-related deaths.

We stand ready to work with you to take the first steps, as you have outlined, to begin the process to reduce the number of guns in our communities. But we also look forward to working with you next year and the year after to make New York State the nation's leader in sensible gun control. Let New York be the state to show the way.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Danielle Laraque', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Danielle Laraque, MD, FAAP
Chair, American Academy of Pediatrics, District II, NYS