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September 25, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan, Leader Pelosi, and Members of the House of Representatives,

We're writing to you to today express our strong opposition to legislation that aims to drastically weaken current laws regulating the transfer and sale of firearm silencers, the so-called Sportsman Heritage and Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) Act, H.R. 3668. If this bill became law, our communities and law enforcement officers would be less safe. While hearing protection is important to prevent hearing loss in hunters and recreational shooters, effective hearing protection devices are already readily available on the market. With 93 Americans killed by guns every day and another 200 injured in non-fatal shootings, easing restrictions on silencers/suppressors threatens the safety of both the public and our police officers.

In accordance with the National Firearms Act of 1934, the ATF has been effectively able to keep silencers out of dangerous hands while still ensuring availability to law-abiding citizens for more than eight decades. The SHARE Act would dismantle those regulations and subject silencers to gaps in federal gun laws, including allowing them to be sold by private sellers without a background check. Silencers could then easily flow into illegal markets and be more readily available for use in violent crimes that are already responsible for more than 11,000 gun homicides annually. Despite gun lobby claims to the contrary, silencers do, in fact, threaten public and law enforcement safety. They reduce the distinct sound of gunfire, making it more difficult for those in proximity of a shooting to recognize the noise as gunshots. Law enforcement officers seeking to respond to a violent incident and determine a perpetrator's location will also be hampered when silencers are used in the commission of crime.

In many recent high-profile shootings, including at a Congressional baseball game and a Washington state high school, innocent people at the scene were able to escape or shelter in safety because they were alerted to gunfire by the sounds of gunshots. Imagine how many more people would have been injured or killed had those sounds been suppressed.

The argument behind deregulating silencers is that it will protect the hearing of hunters, recreational shooters, and gun owners. We find this explanation to be disingenuous, since many effective and inexpensive hearing protection accessories are readily available to gun owners that don't also pose a danger to our communities. Proponents of the SHARE Act are instead acting in the interest of the gun lobby to further weaken America's gun laws in the interest of increasing revenue for the gun industry at the expense of public safety.

Our country's unacceptably high levels of gun violence are a national public health crisis. Congress should be looking for solutions to reduce – rather than potentially increase – the devastation of gun violence in our communities, for our children, our families, and law enforcement. We urge you to put the safety of the American people over the interests of the gun lobby and vote against H.R. 3668.

Sincerely,

Doctors for America
American Public Health Association
American Medical Women's Association
American Nurses Association
The Koop Institute