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On Behalf Of:
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Measure: HB2006

There is a new pattern in mass shootings apparent in Buffalo, Uvalde and here in Bend Oregon last year. Young men bought semi-automatic weapons and very purposefully set out to kill others. In Uvalde it was, again, so many children. Six of the nine deadliest mass shootings in the United States since 2018 were by people who were 21 or younger, representing a shift for mass casualty shootings, which before 2000 were most often initiated by men in their mid-20s to 40s.

These men and adolescents are in an age range, roughly 15 to 25, that law enforcement officials, researchers and policy experts consider a hazardous stage, a period when they are experiencing developmental changes and societal pressures that can turn them toward violence in general, and, in the rarest cases, mass shootings.

We are in the middle of a worsening adolescent mental health crisis that started prior to the pandemic but has been intensified by it. Much of the despair among teenagers and young adults has been inwardly directed, with soaring rates of self-harm and suicide. These desperate individuals who inflict mass shootings are an extreme minority of young people, but one that nonetheless exemplifies broader trends of loneliness, hopelessness and the darker side of a culture saturated by social media and violent content.

We also know that the brain does not finish developing and maturing until the mid- to late 20s. The front part of the brain, called the prefrontal cortex, is one of the last brain regions to mature. This area is responsible for skills like planning, prioritizing, and controlling impulses. These adolescents and young adults deserve a framework of protection from violent impulses, not an open path to using guns to vent their desperation and anger.

Potential causes cited by law enforcement also include the increasingly aggressive marketing of guns to boys, lax state gun laws and federal statutes that make it legal to buy a semi-automatic "long gun" at 18.

Now is the time to take action to pass laws that keep weapons of mass destruction out of the hands of those who are at such risk of killing themselves or others. We strongly support the decisive leadership of legislators in Oregon in the effort to address this aspect of the public health crisis of gun violence in our state.