



Dear Everyone,

We want to give our sincerest condolences to the families and friends of the victims who died in the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting on February 14th 2018. We feel very bad for the people who died and we have sympathy for those who survived in the incident. You have just been through horrifying violence that shouldn't be wished upon anyone.

Unfortunately, violence is something that Black, Latinx (*gender neutral term for Latino/Latina*), Indigenous and undocumented people know very well. In that spirit, we admire your courage to speak up and protest, bringing light to a great conversation about gun violence in this country. We are glad you met with Chicago teens to talk about gun violence and honored that Black people and people of color have been dealing with violence for a long time.

But we are still mad for a lot of reasons right now. Black (specifically African American) youth have been protesting and organizing around violence and gun violence in the United States for some time. For example, The Baltimore Uprisings in 2015 were in response to Freddie Gray being killed by police and the organization BYP100's beginnings in 2013 was due in part to learning that George Zimmerman was found 'not guilty' for the murder of Trayvon Martin. But we often get ignored or told to stop our fight. Our safety in school has also been an issue for a long time. We get mistreated in our schools on a daily and nothing seems to get done about it. We're mad because when we have mental health issues we get executed (killed), put in jail, and suspended and expelled from school. We don't get the same action or response sympathy that you do; it feels like no one cares. We have Black youth all over the country who have been fighting against this type of violence and when white kids are killed the media, the government, and everyone is now paying attention. How is that fair?

We're mad because our schools are the ones that get called "dangerous" even though this kind of shooting has never happened in one of our "urban" schools, where predominantly Black and Brown students attend. We're mad because we can be 13 years old and get charged as adults when this man is 19 and is being charged as a juvenile.

The issue of gun control is important. But the idea of having armed teachers is ludicrous to us and we're ready to fight back against that. That's why we're walking out of school on March 14. But we also believe that our schools needs more than just an absence of guns to be safe. Here's what we want and need for our schools, schools where the majority of students are Black and Brown, to be safe:

- Teachers and staff that look like us: meaning Black and Latinx teachers that reflect the student demographic. The reason is because they understand where we're coming from through a cultural lens.
- Curriculum that honors our histories and teaches our stories.
- Mental health supports and services. More guidance counselors, school counselors, and people in our schools invested in our well-being and our futures.
- Restorative justice so that when conflict happens, we can resolve it in a real way. This type of justice will be totally opposite from the current discipline systems in our schools that send us down the school-to prison pipeline, which ultimately leads to the mass incarceration of majority Black and Brown people.
- Police out of our schools.
- In our larger world, we need a systematic and global end to white supremacy.

We are going to take part in the National School Walkout on March 14th, 2018 at 10am. We need to feel safe in our schools. Arming teachers is the worst idea we have ever heard. No student should ever feel worried about the state of their safety when at school and we are with everyone on that issue. That just adds to the endangerment of students and particularly students of color. We also hope that our frustrations are understood in this because this isn't a frustration only us at Hearing Youth Voices holds. This is a frustration that is held nationwide. People may get tired of hearing the same conversations being brought up but these conversations are ones that need to happen in order for change to be made.

If you want to keep the conversation going and turn those words into action come to our rallies and events, help us get our messages out through your platforms, support Black and Brown leadership, notice where Black and Brown people may already be leading in your community, stay engaged, pay attention to other issues, join an organization, learn more about white supremacy and the history of our country. Keeping moving towards our collective liberation and safety.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Hearing Youth Voices Team