NFTY-NW Resolution to Address Gun Violence

Background:

Jewish tradition emphasizes the sanctity and primary value of human life. The Torah commands us, “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13). The Talmud teaches us that “the one who takes one life it is as though he has destroyed the universe and the one who saves one life it is as though they have saved the universe” (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5). In an increasingly impersonal and alienating society, the dehumanizing of the human being and the carelessness with which human life is taken stand in direct violation of these affirmations of our tradition.

Scripture encourages peaceful pursuit of our mutual welfare. Isaiah exhorts the people of the earth “beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks.” (Isaiah 2:4) We are commanded to turn weapons of destruction into tools for the greater good of society.

The United States experiences epidemic levels of gun violence, claiming over 30,000 lives annually, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For every person who dies from a gunshot wound, two others are wounded. Every year, approximately 100,000 Americans are victims of gun violence. In addition to those who are killed or injured, there are countless others whose lives are forever changed by the deaths of and injuries to their loved ones.

Background checks are the only systematic way to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. But under current federal law, background checks are only required for gun sales at licensed dealers. An estimated 40 percent of gun transfers take place between “private” parties — often at gun shows or through anonymous online transactions — and are not subject to a federal background check. Last year, an estimated 6.6 million guns were transferred this way — no checks, no records, no questions asked.

Sixteen states and Washington, DC, go beyond federal law by requiring a background check for private handgun sales: CA, CT, IA, HI, IL, MD, MA, MI, NE, NJ, NY, NC, PA, RI, CO, and DE. Evidence from these states shows that requiring a background check for private gun sales reduces crime and saves lives.

WHEREAS NFTY-NW acknowledges that there is an epidemic of gun violence throughout the United States, and that Jewish tradition teaches “one cannot stand idly by the blood of their neighbor.”; and

WHEREAS Initiative 594, which extends universal background checks to all private gun sales within Washington state, is the first major piece of legislation that promotes stronger gun responsibility regulations within Washington, and that universal background checks have proven to dramatically decrease the spread of gun violence in states with similar legislation, and
WHEREAS the Union for Reform Judaism, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Anti-Defamation League, Temple Beth Am, Temple Beth Or, Temple De Hirsch Sinai as well as 71 other Washington faith organizations have endorsed Initiative 594, therefore

LET IT BE RESOLVED that NFTY-NW moves to join with other faith organizations in support Initiative 594, and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that NFTY-NW supports any efforts by local, state and national officials to promote gun responsibility and help make our communities safer.

Respectfully submitted,
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Co-signed,
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