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**For Immediate Release**

## **Mountain Lakes League of Women Voters Hosts Panel on Gun Violence Prevention**

On September 28, 2016, the very day that the League of Women Voters Mountain Lakes hosted a meeting on Gun Violence Prevention, there was yet another school shooting in South Carolina.

Preventing a tragedy like this in our community was the goal of this enlightening program featuring speakers from Sandy Hook Promise, Moms Demand Action for Greater Gun Sense, local pediatrician Dr. Dan Kahn, Sergeant Benitez and Chief Bennett of the Mountain Lakes Police Department, and Dr. Anne Mucci, Superintendent of Schools.

“Our hope in hosting this meeting was to educate the community on the enormity and impact that the problem of gun violence has on our youth, and to discuss possible solutions,” shared Emily Kahn, the league member who organized this event.

Dr. Daniel Kahn, a local pediatric physician described gun violence among our youth as nothing less than a significant public health crisis. With 3 of the 91 daily deaths due to gun violence happening among children, Dr. Kahn cited data that shows that gun violence is set to overtake automobile accidents as a leading cause of death in children in the US.

“The American Associates of Pediatric Physicians advocates for stringent adherence to gun safety guidelines which emphasize the need to lock up any firearms if they are in a home where children will be living or visiting, and to separate the ammunition from those firearms,” Kahn explained. “This is the minimum requirement to keep our children safe,” he added. “The only way to be 100% certain there will be no gun violence in a home is not to have a gun in the home.”

Accidental shootings are a common cause of death among children ages 12 and under whose natural curiosity can be lethal. Dr. Kahn described a disturbing study conducted on 64 boys ages 8-12 who were left alone with a gun in a desk drawer and observed behind a two-way mirror. Their parents were shocked by what happened next. Within minutes, 48 found the gun, 30 handled it and 16 pulled the trigger without knowing whether the gun was loaded or unloaded.

Previous education on the dangers of guns and gun safety did not predict how a child responded. This study shows clearly the curiosity of children and the need to do everything we can as adults to keep guns out of their hands. Talking to our children about guns has little to no effect.

Mary Kay Wishneski from Sandy Hook Promise (SHP), addressed the group about actions their nonprofit organization is taking to help prevent further gun tragedy. SHP was formed by parents of the victims of the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School where a total 26 individuals, most of them first grade children, their school principal and teachers, were fatally shot by a member of their community. The gunman had been a student at that school at one time, and felt like an outcast. SHP brings programs to schools that are targeted at the student population, including ‘Say Hello’ for young children and ‘Say Something’ for middle and

high schoolers. These programs try to reduce isolation and bullying, and identify students who are prone to violence before it occurs.

The community of Newtown, Connecticut and Sandy Hook Elementary are demographically similar to Mountain Lakes and Wildwood Elementary. Ms. Wishneski joined Sandy Hook Promise when her neighbor and close friend lost her 6 year-old son Dylan on 12/14 to the gunman. A mother of 3 herself, Ms. Wishneski doesn't hesitate to ask other mothers if there is a gun in the home before she allows her children over to play. This is an important, although uncomfortable step that was identified as essential by another speaker, Ms. Leslie Moran from Moms Demand Action. Leslie brought a videotape that provides suggested ways of talking to our neighbors and friends about the subject of firearms in the home. Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America is a nationwide nonpartisan organization that mobilizes moms and families to advocate for stronger gun laws. The organization was formed the day after the Sandy Hook shooting by a mom in the Midwest who couldn't stand to hear about another mass shooting without taking some kind of action.

Also in attendance were Sergeant Benitez and Chief Bennett of the Mountain Lakes Police Department. The officers fielded questions from the audience on gun ownership and NJ laws.

Dr. Anne Mucci spoke about important aspects of the referendum that address school safety. "The goal of these renovations is to buy time. We are very lucky in our community", Dr. Mucci said, "to have such a close and good working relationship with law enforcement. The goals of the new construction are to have all eyes on the front doors so that we can best monitor who is entering the building. " A portion of the referendum is dedicated to the security of each of the schools, making them fortified and more secure.

This unfortunate new reality makes the security of our schools a high priority. Educating ourselves and our families about the presence of guns and the potential for gun violence in our community are important steps to helping us all stay safe.

Learn more about the League at [www.lwvmtnlakes.com](http://www.lwvmtnlakes.com).

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