



Capitol Fund

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Jury sentences Aurora Massacre shooter to Life Without Parole

After listening to more than 300 witnesses over the last 15 weeks, the jury in the Aurora Theater massacre has indicated that they could not reach a unanimous decision on the death penalty. In her closing statements, the defense attorney argued that the defendant should not be put to death because of a mental illness, and that deaths should not be answered by more death. For the remainder of his days, James Egan Holmes will reside within the walls of a Colorado prison.

We at Colorado Ceasefire recognize the difficult decision that faced the jurors as they endeavored to determine what was the appropriate punishment for what no one denies was a truly horrific crime. We hold in our thoughts the victims of that horrendous morning and the struggles of their families to reconstruct their lives. In the last few days, those family members have enlightened us to the ordeals of losing a loved one to such an incomprehensible act of evil. Even if the sentence was not what they had wanted, we are hopeful that the conclusion of this trial will bring for them a sense of closure as they embark on a new phase in their healing.

In response to the Aurora Theater and Sandy Hook Massacres, Colorado enacted stronger gun laws, including universal background checks and a ban on high capacity ammunition magazines, which were used in both murderous rampages. Even as the trial progressed, gun rights activists have been gearing up for another run at repealing the ban on magazines such as the one the Aurora shooter used.

This summer the nation has repeatedly been subjected to stories of mass shootings, one even in another theater. There are two factors frequently present in these massacres – dangerous individuals with mental health issues and easy access to firearms.

“For our nation, reports of wanton slaughter by firearms in the hands of unhinged people are all too common,” Eileen McCarron of Colorado Ceasefire contended.

After the Isla Vista massacre, California enacted a Gun Violence Restraining Order law, wherein family members and law enforcement officials who observe dangerous behaviors of an individual, can obtain, through the courts, a temporary prohibition on the purchase or possession of firearms. Colorado should draw from that law, the lessons of the Aurora Theater and this summer’s shootings to consider further means to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous individuals. Surely the heart-wrenching stories of lost lives and ruptured families should convince us that complacency is not an option.

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The Colorado Ceasefire Capitol Fund is a statewide organization that works to reduce gun violence through legislation and education.