

# SURVIVORS AND VICTIMS' FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES DAWSON COLLEGE (2006) AND CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY (1992) SHOOTINGS

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May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021

Members of parliament  
**Liberal Party of Canada**  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear parliamentarians,

Next September 13th, fifteen years will have passed since a young man from Laval carried out a premeditated mass shooting at Montreal's Dawson College with a semi-automatic assault weapon and a handgun. Over a period of mere minutes, he shot twenty victims, one of whom was Anastasia De Sousa. Anastasia was shot twelve times at close range. She died of her injuries. She was 18. Had police not happened to have been close by, the carnage would have been much worse.

The co-signers of this letter include Anastasia's family, students who survived their gunshot wounds as well as our parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles – all of whose lives are forever impacted by this terrible event. Also include are family and colleagues of professors Phoivos Ziogas, Matthew Douglass, Michael Hogben and Aaron Jaan Saber who were shot and killed in 1992 at Concordia University.

For the last decade and a half, a small number among us have been advocating for change with respect to the law that allowed a troubled and angry young man to have legal access to weapons that enable mass shootings. Anastasia's mother Louise, survivor Meaghan Hennegan and her mother Kathlene Dixon who also witnessed the shooting, as well as Hayder Kadhim who survived a serious head injury have spent years lobbying Ottawa for tougher gun control, including a total ban on assault weapons like the Beretta CX4 Storm that shot all but [6 of the 78 bullets](#) that were fired that day. They follow in the footsteps of Mark Hogben and Concordia University officials who advocated for tougher controls in the years following the 1992 shootings.

The Gun lobby argues that the “problem” does not concern legal gun owners but rather “criminals” or “gangs” with illegal guns. This is demonstrably false. While half of gun homicides are related to gangs, the other half [are not](#). Most mass shooters are legal gun owners, including the gunmen who shot at us or our loved ones at Dawson and Concordia. In fact, Kimveer Gill was a member of a gun club in nearby Ville Saint-Pierre, the same facility where Valery Fabrikant [trained](#) before murdering four of his colleagues in 1992.

**Gill should never have been granted a gun license.** His troubling behaviour led him to be expelled from the military [after only four weeks](#). Recruits remember his penchant for guns and

his desire to become a sniper. While most soldiers bring pictures of their family and girlfriends, Gill brought gun magazines. The Polytechnique shooter was also rejected by the military for antisocial behaviour. In other words, individuals that the Canadian army deemed too unstable to handle guns in the strictly controlled environment of the military are entrusted by our laws to have guns at home.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the Beretta Cx4 Storm pistol-caliber carbine and the Glock pistol he used should not have been legally accessible. After the Concordia shootings, university representatives presented the House of Commons with a [200,000-signature petition](#) to ban the private ownership of handguns. In 2005, the Liberal Party [promised](#) to ban handguns. After the Dawson shootings, [coroner Jacques Ramsay](#) wrote that had the spirit of the 1995 Firearms Act been respected, weapons such as the Beretta CX4 Storm would have been prohibited.

Many of us therefore applauded when the Liberal government issued the May 1, 2020 Orders in Council that finally prohibited (most) assault weapons, including the Beretta CX4 Storm. But by rescinding your promise to remove these weapons from circulation, what should have been a victory for public safety has now been severely undermined, both in terms of protecting the public and by leaving these prohibitions open to being overturned by a future government.

The absence of any concrete proposals to stem the proliferation of handguns cements this government's attempt to strengthen gun control as a resounding failure.

Indeed, the Liberal gun control bill introduced last February 16<sup>th</sup> has forced us to come together and for the first time to come forward as a united voice. We are inspired by [other victims](#) who also publicly expressed their anger at Bill C-21 and we support their call for its complete overhaul.

We will not mince our words. Bill C-21 is an insult to all victims of gun violence. It looks like it was designed by public relations consultants, rather than by public safety experts. It looks like its sole purpose is to provide tough-sounding [sound bites](#) that belie the total lack of substance behind the [“measures”](#) they purportedly describe. For example:

***“Combat intimate partner and gender-based violence”*** by doing nothing about the flaws in the current system (like when “red flags” are ignored) and allowing authorities to offload their responsibility to protect potential victims who could henceforth be directed to go to court and argue their own case to convince a judge to remove the guns in their abuser's possession.

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<sup>1</sup> Bill C-71 adopted two years ago in May of 2019 compels a firearms officer to consider the applicant's lifetime history, not just the preceding five years, as well as a wider array of risk factors. However, the wide discretion conferred to firearms officers that allows the granting of licenses despite these risks remains unchanged. Bill C-71 has not yet been implemented.

***“Fight gun smuggling and trafficking”*** by simply increasing the maximum penalty for trafficking, even though everyone knows that increasing the severity of punishment **does little** to deter crime.

***“Help create safer communities”*** by doing nothing to stem the proliferation of handguns, and by off-loading the responsibility to municipalities despite the lack of evidence regarding the effectiveness of local “bans” and the quasi-universal rejection of the idea by municipalities across the country.

***“Protect Canadians from gun violence”*** in relation to legal magazines that can be converted to illegally hold 30, 50 even 100 bullets, by making modified magazines “more illegal” – as if that will deter potential mass shooters.

***“Complete the prohibition of assault-style firearms”*** by rescinding the promise to remove them from circulation, allowing tens of thousands of fully functional killing machines to remain in private hands.

It is one thing to oppose gun control and to legislate accordingly. It is quite another to get elected on the promise to strengthen gun control and then capitulate to the gun lobby with an offensively hollow bill – all the while duping the public with **claims** to the effect that it’s the “strongest action in our country’s history against gun violence”. Unbelievably, this dubious and disingenuous public relations strategy continues to this day.

The families and communities impacted by these weapons wake up every day mustering the courage to go on with their lives in spite of their loss and trauma. Four families at Concordia and one at Dawson were torn apart. Many survivors are still struggling with their physical and psychological injuries. A third of Dawson students **suffered mental health consequences** including post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, alcohol dependence and social phobia.

We were ordinary people doing ordinary things – going to work, going to school, just living our lives. Just like all of you. And because our political leadership failed to act, because promises were broken, our lives are no longer ordinary, they are forever changed. And now have to ask ourselves: does our government not even care to prevent similar massacres?

We are asking you to show some courage and integrity and to reconsider Bill C-21 in its entirety. Keep your 2005 promise to ban handguns. Keep your 2015 promise to get handguns out of our streets and our communities. Keep your 2019 promise to get rid of assault weapons once and for all. Bring in real improvements for victims of domestic violence with regards to “red flags”. Ensure that the precautionary principle is applied when granting and revoking firearm licenses. Prioritize public safety, not the interests of the gun lobby.

Until that time, you will be the party that let the gun lobby win.

**Louise De Sousa**, mother of Anastasia De Sousa

**Nelson De Sousa**, father of Anastasia

**Nicholas DeSousa**, bother of Anastasia

**Sarah De Sousa**, sister of Anastasia, Dawson graduate – 2010

**James Santos**, graduate of Dawson, hostage, survivor

**Vanessa Pizzichemi**, fiancée of James

**Anna Medeiros**, mother of James

**Katarina Santos**, sister of James

**Meaghan Hennegan**, Dawson student – 2006, Survivor

**Kathlene Dixon**, witness to the Dawson shooting, mother of Meaghan Hennegan

**Kenneth Dow**, father of Meaghan

**Kailey Hennegan**, sister of Meaghan

**Hayder Kadhim**, Dawson graduate – 2008, Survivor

**Sadik Kadhim**, father of Hayder

**Hana Joudi**, mother of Hayder

**Hawra Kadhim**, sister of Hayder

**Hassan Kadhim**, brother of Hayder

**Wasan Dorias**, wife of Hayder

**Robyn Flynn**, Dawson graduate – 2007, witness

**Sara Saber-Freedman**, wife of Concordia University professor Aaron Jaan Saber in 1992

**Dr Patrick Kenniff**, Rector & Vice-Chancellor, Concordia University – 1984-1994

**Hugh Brodie**, Assistant-Rector, Concordia University 1989-1994, Manager of the Parliamentary Petition to ban Handguns

*Extended family and friends:*

*Anastasia De Sousa:*

**Michael Panzera**, partner of Sarah De Sousa

**Jacqueline Mancini**, partner of Nicolas De Sousa

**Wanda Hevey**, grandmother

**Real Hevey**, uncle

**Pierre Hevey**, uncle

**Johanne Theberge**, aunt

**Natalya Hevey**, aunt

**Adan Rivas**, uncle

**Maria Reis**, grandmother

**Steve De Sousa**, uncle

**Cheryl De Sousa**, aunt

**Sandra De Sousa**, aunt

**Priscilla Rivas**, cousin

**Brandon Rivas**, cousin

**Enrique Rivas**, cousin

**Anthony Hevey**, cousin

**Daniel Hevey**, cousin

**Kathleen Robinson**, cousin

**Jennifer Robinson**, cousin

**Josie Desjardins**, cousin

**Lyne Desjardins**, cousin

**Stella Vivier**, cousin

**Ashley Redman**, best friend

**Felicia Marino**, best friend

**Alexandra Mancini**, friend

**Helen Cazilieris**, friend

*Hayder Kadhim:*

**Nasir Salih**, close family friend

**Ali Sadik**, close family friend

**Kadhim Mahdy**, close family friend

**Saad Sadik**, close family friend

**Hakim Habib**, close family friend