

Bucks County students call on state legislators to support tougher gun laws

By Freda Savana

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Members of the Bucks County Women's Action Coalition youth committee delivered letters to state legislators demanding they support stronger gun safety laws.

Echoing what has become a nationwide message, Central Bucks High School students told state Sen. Chuck McIlhinney, R-10, Wednesday that "thoughts and prayers are not enough" in response to another school shooting.

Eight teens, members of the Bucks County Women's Advocacy Coalition youth committee, filled a small conference room at the lawmakers' Doylestown Borough office and delivered a letter, signed by 102 students, demanding he support stronger gun control legislation. The group also took a similar letter to the office of state Rep. Marguerite Quinn's, R-143.

"Students can't vote yet," said Sophie Griffiths, 17. "But students care."

Quinn was in Harrisburg, but, through an aide, said she would be responding to the student's letter, said Lydia Winderman, a BCWAC member.

Saying they were profoundly upset by last week's killing of 17 people at a Parkland, Florida, high school, as well as by all the country's mass shootings, the students expressed fear that such murderous rampages are becoming routine. But, said, Sabrina Irej, 17, "that must be the furthest thing from the new normal."

McIlhinney, who announced last month that he won't be seeking re-election after his term ends this year, told the students he has long supported legislation that would prohibit people receiving mental health services from buying a gun. "That should be a flag," said the legislator.

McIlhinney said he also favors expanded background checks.

However, he noted, changing Pennsylvania law is not sufficient. “There needs to be a national standard. It doesn’t do any good, if someone can just go to New Jersey or Delaware and buy a gun.” The state can pass resolutions calling on Congress to create national laws, McIlhinney added.

Sophia Rubin, a junior at Central Bucks East, said she was pleased with the meeting, but there’s still much to do.

“We’re being taught in school how to defend ourselves against an attacker. It’s very scary,” she said.

“That’s our new reality,” added Sabrina. “No place is safe anymore,” said Shreya Babu, a 16-year-old student at Central Bucks East.

In the conclusion of their letter, the students wrote, “This is not a political issue, this is a public health epidemic. The signatures on this letter attest to the will of our fellow students, that gun violence cannot be ignored.”

The students said they plan to take part in the National School Walkout planned for March 14.



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