

Dear friends,

I am heartbroken over the news of the deadly act of gun violence that occurred today during Huguenot High School's graduation, a time that should have been a moment of great joy. Students should never have fear to gather, especially at such a pivotal moment in their lives. While we don't have all the facts yet, we do know that mass shooting events like this one have tragically become all too common in our country. Now, it has sadly come to our city, our very own backyard. Many members of our Congregation have links to the Richmond City School District and Huguenot High School. If you or a loved one is in need of any support, please do not hesitate to contact me (rabbi.knopf@bethelrichmond.org) or Cantor Rosenblatt (cantor.rosenblatt@bethelrichmond.org).

Meanwhile, we must not allow ourselves to become numb to this violence. As we wait for more details, we must not become numb to what is now a common phenomena in our country. We should not fear gathering with our friends, going to a restaurant, seeing a movie, or stepping up to receive a Diploma. Too often, those places that should be a normal part of our lives have been marked by tragedy. We should be outraged that this occurs so frequently in this country. We should speak up and speak out, denouncing the specter of gun violence that is far too common. We must tell our leaders that we are outraged: that we will not accept gun violence as "the price to pay to be free". The price is always too high. We must do more to work for a safer community. We must urge our leaders to make this the issue of humanity that it is.

That is why we at Temple Beth-El, along with our partner congregations in the RISC network, have been working hard over the past few years to implement a proven program for gun-violence prevention in Richmond. I invite you to join us in this sacred work of building a community free of gun violence. If you are interested in participating, please contact me, or our **Social Action/Tikkun Olam** chair, Kristin Gorin (KristinGorin@gmail.com).

I pray that God comforts those in mourning. May the Holy One grant us strength and bless us with peace.

Rabbi Michael Knopf