



June 13, 2022

Dear WAMFT Community,

Maryland. Uvalde. Buffalo. San Jose. Indianapolis. Boulder. El Paso. Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL. Las Vegas Strip. Freeman (eastern WA). Pulse Nightclub in Orlando. San Bernardino. Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston. Marysville, WA. Fort Hood. Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown. Aurora. Virginia Tech in Blacksburg. Capitol Hill in Seattle. Columbine High School in Littleton, CO.

The list seems endless, and the list above doesn't begin to capture every mass shooting that has occurred since the Columbine shooting in the United States. These are some of the more high-profile cases that evoke memories for many of us. We might remember where we were when this tragedy occurred or what we were doing when the news broke about this atrocity. Other places are listed that might be less memorable but accentuate just how much tragedy and loss so many have borne due to gun violence.

The recent shootings in Maryland, Buffalo, New York and Uvalde, Texas continue the unnecessary horror of gun violence in this country, and if you dig into the details, you will see the intertwining of gun violence, bigotry, fractured mental health, and systemic challenges that pervade communities around, gun control, community, mental illness and police response.

In Buffalo, the mass shooter deliberately and systematically targeted Black people. This is evidenced not only by the fact that 11 of the 13 victims were Black, but he wrote a 180-page document identifying himself as a white supremacist and anti-Semite who wanted to "shoot all black people." The shooter harbored deeply racist and white supremacist views that led to racial terrorism and violence.

In Uvalde, the mass shooter gunned down 19 children and 2 teachers most of whom were Latino. In addition to the sickening tragedy of killing children was the apparent miscarriage of justice and bravery from the Uvalde police on the scene. An hour and 15 minutes after the first police contact, responding officers stood by, even going so far as to block families who rushed to the school to try to save their children, before finally entering the room and killing the shooter.

In Maryland, a shooter killed 3 factory workers and injured one using a semi-automatic handgun. Another shooting in our country. At the time of this writing, it is unclear what else motivated this atrocity, but the specter of gun violence remains one undeniable fact in this case.

These details are horrific to recount, but they cannot begin to describe the trauma, grief, and utter despair so many people now must endure in the aftermath of a loss that never should have been, a loss imposed upon them by rage, racism, bigotry, which have all been made possible by broken gun laws across our country.

In writing this letter on behalf of the WAMFT Board of Directors and as president, it is impossible to summarize or fully capture the depths of brokenness, the endless “root causes” theorized for mass shootings, and how to bear witness to the pain and utter depravity of it all.

What do we do as MFTs? We have the training and skill to think and intervene systemically knowing that to do otherwise will only lead to temporary changes that won't forge new patterns of wellness within and between people. The pain of this work is that we experience the healing our work can bring people and even communities, but often the larger systems seem to tell a wholly hopeless story of pain, loss, violence, and trauma.

Our hope is that we continue to look to our profession and others to mobilize and support our communities directly and indirectly. We might not always see how the fruit of our work manifests at a larger scale, but we are needed.

Relational therapists do make a difference. We provide a safe harbor for people of all backgrounds, situations, and suffering from all manner of traumas and maladies. We help instill a relational perspective in our clients and communities giving them the tools to break patterns of violence and oppression. It is hard to measure those efforts across time and communities, yet they are there.

WAMFT is a safe harbor for MFTs and other helping professionals to help support and represent the needs of our members who dedicate themselves to advocating for the wellness, safety, and health of individuals, their significant relationships, and their communities. WAMFT will continue to advocate for MFTs as professionals and for the profession because we know the healing you bring to those who suffer. WAMFT will continue to promote anti-racism and anti-oppression and help bring awareness, networking, and training to Washington State.

We hope you can take a moment for yourself to breathe and to remind yourself why you entered this work. We invite you to act by getting involved with governance at the local

levels as well as nationally and to center these issues in your therapy work more intentionally. Bill Doherty's notion of the "citizen professional" or "citizen therapist" offers one way we as therapists can choose to work with communities and not just for them (see [My Journey as a Citizen Therapist](#)).

WAMFT will host a **Community Cafe on Friday, July 22, 2022 from 11:00 to 12:30pm** to offer a space for WAMFT members to lift up our voices to make an impact and seek support. We want to offer a space to discuss how we can use our training to support change, [third order change](#) in particular. We want to actively foster change in our communities by bringing vital conversations about violence and oppression into our therapy rooms. Topics of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, oppression and racism must compliment how we usher in wellness in the therapy rooms and in our communities. We will share more information and how to register soon.

In the meantime, there are several places to provide immediate support for those victimized by these shootings as well as organizations tackling issues of racism and gun violence at the community level. WAMFT supports these efforts to bring about healing, financial support, and fundamental change.

- [AAMFT Statement and Support Resources for Mass Shootings](#)
- **Donate Directly to Love Ones Affected**
 - [Verified GoFundMe Hub to Support Buffalo Shooting Victims' Loved Ones](#)
 - [Verified GoFundMe Hub to Support Uvalde Shooting Victims' Loved Ones](#)
- **Donate to Communities**
 - [Buffalo 5/14 Survivor Fund](#)
 - [Buffalo Together Fund](#)
 - [Buffalo Community Fridges](#) (helps support food insecurity in the community)
 - [San Antonio Legal Services Association](#) (provide legal services to Uvalde victims' families)
- **Donate to Organizations Fighting Systemic Issues**
 - Racial Justice
 - [Race Forward](#)
 - [Developing Racial Equity in Gun Violence Prevention](#) (Education Fund to Stop Gun Violence)
 - Gun Violence Prevention
 - [Sandy Hook Promise](#)
 - [Violence Policy Center](#)
 - Support for Teachers
 - [DonorsChoose: Support a Classroom](#)

- **Washington State Efforts to Support Victims of Mass Shootings**
 - [University of Washington Combined Fund Drive: School Shooting: How to Help the Uvalde Community](#)
 - [Everytown.org Washington State](#) (advocate directly to congress)

To share a resource or make a request for how WAMFT can support our community of MFTs, please contact us at wamft@wamft.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Finley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michelle Finley, PhD, LMFT

WAMFT President