

**Testimony of Sandra J. Wortham**  
**“Proposals to Reduce Gun Violence: Protecting Our Communities While Respecting the**  
**Second Amendment”**  
**Hearing before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on the Constitution,**  
**Civil Rights and Human Rights**  
**February 12, 2013**

Good morning Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cruz, and members of the committee. My name is Sandra Wortham, and I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today. It is an honor.

On May 19, 2010 I was having a good day. During the early evening I went to line dancing class with my mother, as we did every Wednesday. We had fun. When I got home a friend asked me to go out with her to scout locations for her birthday party. I of course said yes. So, we went out. Again, we had fun. Then, we got in the car to head home.

The fun ended then.

When we were about 5 minutes away from my house my mother called me. It wasn't unusual for her to call because we talk a thousand times a day. But this call was different. She was crying. She said, “Sandy, come home.” She continued to speak through her tears, “They tried to rob him.” The “him” my mother spoke of was my older brother, Thomas E. Wortham IV.

Thomas and I grew up in a strong family. Our parents taught us that we could be anything we wanted to be. But they also taught us that we had a responsibility to help others along the way. That is how Thomas lived his life. Like many other siblings we often fought like cats and dogs, but he always watched out for me.

Thomas dedicated his professional life to serving others. He joined the National Guard, serving two tours in Iraq. He was also a Chicago Police Officer, and he worked to protect our community on the South Side of Chicago. Earlier that week he'd traveled here, to Washington, D.C., to participate in activities for National Police Week honoring our Nation's fallen law enforcement officers. He then traveled to New York City to run in a race in honor of Chicago Police Officer Alex Valadez, who was shot and killed in the line of duty the year before. So, on the night of May 19th Thomas stopped by to show our parents his pictures from Police Week. When they finished, he walked to the front door to leave. My father followed him to the door to watch him out.

I wasn't there, but this is what reports say happened. As Thomas walked over to his motorcycle two men walked towards him, pulled out a gun, and tried to take his motorcycle. Two more men were in a car nearby. Thomas was armed, and he identified himself as a police officer. My father, a retired Chicago Police Sergeant, also had a gun and when he saw what was happening he ran back into the house to get it. There was an exchange of gunfire between Thomas, my father, and the robbers.

When I got the call from my mother I had no idea how bad it was. My friend tried to drive me to the house but shortly after I got the call the traffic stopped. When I looked ahead I saw that the police had blocked off all of the streets on our route. Again, it didn't even occur to me that this had anything to do with Thomas. But I knew I needed to get home. So I got out of the car and started to run. As I ran an ambulance passed me. I know now that the ambulance was carrying my brother. He had been shot.

We went to the hospital and we waited. I prayed, and we waited. But Thomas died.

Just a few days before my brother was killed he was interviewed by the Chicago Tribune about recent shootings in our neighborhood. He said, "When people think of the South Side of Chicago, they think violence." He went on to say, "We're going to fix it, so it doesn't happen again." I am here today because I want to fix it too.

This hearing has been called to show that we can protect our communities while respecting the Second Amendment. I have to be honest and say I'm not sure where there can be serious disagreement on this. My family and I are not anti-gun people. My brother and my father were police officers- they were trained with guns and carried them most of the time. I value and respect the rights provided by our Constitution. However, I find it hard to believe that our founders intended those rights to go unreasonably unchecked.

This isn't about taking away the right to lawfully own guns. This is about trying our best to keep guns out of the hands of people like the ones who killed my brother. They didn't walk into a gun store and buy a handgun, because if the news reports are right they wouldn't have been eligible to buy one. So they got the gun the same way many ill-intentioned individuals obtain weapons--they bought it on the street.

It is also reality that the gun used to kill my brother didn't get to Chicago on its own. It was trafficked from a pawn shop in Mississippi. According to news reports, a gun trafficker went to Mississippi, used straw purchasers to buy multiple handguns from that shop and other shops, and then brought those guns to Chicago to sell to gang members.

I cannot accept the notion that we can't fix this. If we know, as we do, that in many places criminals have fairly easy street access to guns, don't we have a responsibility to address that issue to the best of our ability? I would say yes. Common sense gun laws to keep guns out of the wrong hands do not hurt decent people. The only people who should be disturbed by them are those people that shouldn't have guns in the first place and those who participate in funneling guns to those criminals.

When we speak about rights and the Constitution I think we would all be well served to remember the words of another important document in our Country's history---"life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Those rights were taken away from my brother at age 30.

My brother carried a gun. My father carried a gun. But the fact that my brother and father were armed that night did not prevent my brother from being killed. We need to do more to keep guns out of the wrong hands in the first place. I don't think that makes us anti-gun, I think it makes us pro-decent, law abiding people.

I am not here to say that any one law would necessarily have stopped what happened to my brother. But I am saying that we can do better.

This isn't about me, Thomas or our family alone. This is about our country. We are just one of too many families who have experienced horror and death as a result of gun violence. Some of our loved ones were killed with assault weapons. Some with guns that were straw purchased or sold without background checks. All of us want to prevent any more families from going through what we have endured. Gun violence is a problem in our country that needs to be fixed, and we have an opportunity, through this process, to help save lives. I hope we can do it.

Thank you for your time.