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Statement of Mayor Nancy R. Rotering to the Lake County Committee of the Whole August 5, 2022

Highland Park, Illinois – Good morning, Chair Hart, and members of the Lake County Board. Thank you for inviting me to discuss what happened in Highland Park on the Fourth of July and how we must work together to stop gun violence in our communities.

My name is Nancy Rotering. I am the Mayor of Highland Park. We are represented on the Lake County Board by County Board Member Paul Frank and County Board Member Paras Parekh.

The Fourth of July mass shooting in Highland Park shook the community to its core. Our horror has rippled far and wide. Our annual parade brings together friends and neighbors from Highland Park, Highwood, and communities throughout Lake County and beyond. It is a beloved tradition where first children and pets, followed by local groups perform, march, sing, dance, and play music as they wave to the crowd and walk through our central business district. Like so many American cities and towns, we exuberantly celebrate our patriotism and hometown pride. While we were thrilled to host this event once again, especially after missing our time together due to the pandemic, our joy was shattered by the mass shooting.

We are a city experiencing grief. We read about mass shootings, but until it arrives in your front yard, the magnitude of devastation that we know from the US Department of Justice will last for years, if not decades. It is incomprehensible.

Yesterday marked the one-month remembrance. It still doesn't feel real, but we remember and honor the seven individuals who were taken too soon, and we keep all those injured, so many still trying to physically recover, and their families in our thoughts.

Highland Park experienced a traumatic event that will impact us all in different ways. As a community, we are finding the strength to move forward together – one community in solidarity. Each of us plays a part in supporting neighbors, friends, and loved ones through this crisis.

Our recovery will be awkward, and it may be daunting as we approach milestones and transitions individually and as a community, including how we acknowledge day, month, and year remembrances, the changes in seasons, annual events, holidays, and more. The unknown is uncomfortable, but we know that we are not alone in our hesitation.

We are so appreciative of all the leaders and organizations who have joined together to show the world what it means to be strong in the face of trauma and to lift our community with special care and attention. Thank you for the support that we have received from Lake County including Gary Gibson and Cassandra Hiller, Lake County Emergency Management Agency staff notably Dan Eder, Lake County Health Department personnel, Sheriff Idleburg, and Deputy Chief Covelli, the Lake County State's Attorney Office, the Coroner's Office, and the County Public Information Office. These individuals and agencies have stood with us providing safe, quality, trusted care and services.

There is no roadmap to tell any of us what to do when something of this magnitude hits home, but it is the decisions followed by the actions we take that dictate who we are and what we can be. If there is even one step that we can take to save another human life and keep another town from enduring our pain, we have an obligation to try. We know that no community is immune to gun violence. Among the mayors there is the common refrain of "not if, but when" a mass shooting will come to our towns.

And what is equally concerning, our children talk about "not if, but when." Our children knew *exactly* what to do on the Fourth of July because they have been training for an active shooter their entire lives. What does this say about us as a society?

This shooting was a reminder that action against the gun violence epidemic is needed now. We are uniquely positioned to meet this moment of national urgency. I promised my community as their Mayor, as their neighbor, as a parent, as a child of Highland Park, as a human being - I will not stop trying and I ask you to join me today, right here, right now.

In 1988, a woman entered Ravinia Elementary School in Highland Park with a gun and explosives. Laurie Dann attempted to set off an explosive in the school, then proceeded to drive to nearby Winnetka where she shot five children, killing eight-year-old Nicky Corwin. I tell this story because we know that no town is truly safe from gun violence, and over the years, the decades, those who could, did not do enough to improve gun laws.

In 2013, the Highland Park City Council, under my leadership, passed an ordinance that banned assault weapons and large capacity magazines. Of note, Lake County Board Member Paul Frank was part of that team, thank you Board Member Frank.

We then fought the NRA all the way to the US Supreme Court, where we prevailed. Our case set a precedent that makes it constitutional for cities, towns, and counties to ban assault weapons and large capacity magazines in Illinois. Unfortunately, the Illinois General Assembly did not see the need to allow that opportunity to extend across the state, allowing other cities to take that Constitutional action if they chose to, or better, enact a state-wide ban. We are now pursuing those legislative initiatives, but a message needs to be sent that we need help. A single city or county cannot protect its residents because they are not islands within the state. Our law reflected our community's values, and we did what was feasible under existing law at that time. What community doesn't value public safety and protecting human life?

I know that restricting access to assault weapons does not stop all gun violence but banning weapons of war is one common-sense step we can take. It is worth it even if just one life is saved. I am sickened that my town, and you should be sickened that our county, like so many others, has been added to an ongoing list of places where mass shootings have happened - a list that should not even exist.

Combat weapons have no place on our streets. While we need a Federal Assault Weapons Ban, we as elected representatives need to take any action we can to move this effort forward. Like so many vital initiatives to protect public health and safety, we need to do what we can where we can. Our constituents deserve better.

Congress passed its first major piece of gun reform in 30 years in June, which was a first step to reduce the threat of violence across our country. We saw another glimmer of hope last week when the US House of Representatives passed HR 1808, The Assault Weapons Ban of 2022. This bill moves on to the Senate where we have two Illinois champions in Senator Tammy Duckworth and Senator Dick Durbin, but this is a long process and we do not have time to wait.

Cook County has had an assault weapons and large capacity magazine ban for years. Now is the time to act. *You can take another step forward in saving lives. Add your voice and officially pass a resolution supporting both a state and federal law that will ban assault weapons and large capacity magazines.* The debate should not be about whether we are burdening lawful gun owners with new regulations. The debate should be whether we are taking common sense steps to save even one life from gun violence.

I have been having conversations with neighbors, the Highland Park business community, area clergy, representatives at all levels of government, Governor Pritzker, and our federal representatives and agencies. I am encouraged that these leaders share the values of our town, recognize that protecting the safety and well-being of every human life is paramount, and understand that we as a community are scarred. They stand with Highland Park, and they are already helping us as we navigate a path forward.

I know each of you understand the necessity to act and I ask that you join us.

Thank you.

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