Speech by SDA member at Advocacy Day

Hello, my name is Portia Carney and I am a junior at Juneau-Douglas High School. A few years ago I began following Everytown for Gun Safety on social media and I became interested in what they do, yet at the time I didn’t know what I could do to support their mission. I became more and more tired of turning on the news and hearing the same words “shooting” or even worse “school shooting.” When Donald Trump was elected and it was clear that he would not support any gun safety measures, even after the Parkland school shooting, I became enraged. Hundreds of Juneau students participated in a walkout to the Capitol to remember the victims and communicate with Legislators that students weren’t going to sit at this happen - things had to change.

But following the walkout, students (me included) got back to normal life and the momentum in Juneau faded. That is, until last fall, when my mother told me she joined the new Juneau chapter of the National Moms Demand Action. I knew I wanted to get involved in some way. She mentioned that we could form a Students Demand Action group here in Juneau - actually the very first one in Alaska! Katie McKenna, another junior here at JDHS who led the Parkland walk-out and protest, spoke about the victims and the need for President Trump to better protect schools and limit access to guns, volunteered to co-lead the Students Chapter with me here in Juneau. Many students at JDHS had been involved in the walk-out and I knew would like to get involved and make a difference and make our school and community a safe place to live. Now we are a student group of over twenty, about half are here in the room today. Can you all stand up? We meet 2-3 times a month.

We are here today to lobby for our rights as students to pass common sense gun laws. The Red Flag law is a chance that we can not let slip through our fingers. With the ability to remove firearms from people who have threatening feelings for themselves or others, we can and will save many lives. Suicide accounts for nearly two-thirds of gun deaths in the United States, and the gun firearm suicide rate in Alaska exceeds the national average. Between 2013 and 2017, more than 800 Alaskans were killed by guns. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 72 percent of all firearm deaths were firearm suicides, killing nearly 600 residents. With the Red Flag Law, those guns can be taken out of the hands of all those who feel that the gun is their only option. It’s possible the Parkland mass shooting wouldn’t have happened if there had been a Red Flag Law. According to reports, the alleged shooter was known to have firearms, and his mother had contacted law enforcement regarding his behavior on multiple occasions. It’s possible those 17 victims would still be alive. This bill can save lives and we must all fight for it. It can and will make a difference especially in a State where many people own guns for hunting and safety. Our Students Demand Action group is here today to tell Alaska Legislators we want to protect our schools from gun violence, and limit access to those that shouldn’t have guns. HB 62 should be passed and Students are here to tell Alaskans it’s time.