

[MUSIC PLAYING]

NINA MOINI: As the legislative session kicks off this month, a group of Minneapolis parents are determined to drive change around gun violence in Minnesota. Their children attend Annunciation Catholic school and were present during the mass shooting on August 27. Two children were killed and 28 others injured. As their community takes steps to heal, the parents also want to ensure that nothing like it ever happens again. Feven Gerezgiher has more.

FEVEN GEREZGIHER: There was a mass shooting at Brown University in December, just months after the one at Annunciation. Brittany Haeg says the news hit her hard, particularly after she learned one survivor had already lived through the 2018 shooting at Florida's Parkland High school.

BRITTANY HAEG: My kiddo was six when he was shot in a school. Shooting, and that's a lot of school we have ahead of us. And for me, it was like a gut check and a reminder that we need to step away from screens, and we need to talk to each other.

FEVEN GEREZGIHER: Haeg is one of dozens of Annunciation parents that mobilized to form an advocacy group last fall, this in a year when the state has seen several high profile tragedies involving firearms, including the assassination of state Representative Melissa Hortman and her husband and dog, and the shooting of State Senator John Hoffman and his wife. Lawmakers say addressing gun violence will be a priority this session.

Governor Walz indicated his support in December when he issued executive orders aimed at reducing gun violence and called for a ban on assault weapons and high capacity magazines. Krista Neville co-leads the advocacy group called the Annunciation Light Alliance. She says they're focused on bridging political divides through telling their stories.

KRISTA NEVILLE: For us, it doesn't matter what side of the spectrum you're on. It's more so about, let's just have a good, open conversation and dialogue. The reality is, we've got to think as a more collective group on what this looks like and how we can stop this from continuing to happen, because it hasn't been working so far.

FEVEN GEREZGIHER: The Annunciation Light Alliance will hold events tomorrow and Thursday at the State Capitol with Annunciation staff and students. They will also install school desks outside the building to represent the more than 200 Minnesota children killed by gun violence since 2021. Group leaders say they know addressing gun violence may take more than just one solution or one legislative session. Feven Gerezgiher, MPR News, Minneapolis.

NINA MOINI: Our thanks to Feven for that report. And tomorrow, lawmakers at the Capitol are set to start considering what specific actions to take around gun safety. DFL State Representative Emma Greenman, who represents some of the Annunciation community in South Minneapolis, will introduce a bill that aims to ban assault weapons in Minnesota. She's with me now to tell us more. Thanks for joining me, Representative Greenman.

EMMA GREENMAN: Thank you for having me.

NINA MOINI: I'm sure you were just listening to the piece before. Since these tragic events at Annunciation, everybody has been wondering where lawmakers are going to focus efforts this session. We hear debates around mental health resources, assault weapon bans, weapons storage, ghost guns with no serial numbers that can't be traced. Tell us about your bill, what it's focusing on, and why you felt it was critical to start in that place.

EMMA GREENMAN: Well, you heard from many of my constituents and the folks who are impacted by the Annunciation school shooting, where we joined just the most recent community to be rocked by these weapons of war and this epidemic of mass shootings. And so all of the things you mentioned are things we need to do. And we need a comprehensive approach. But in order to get to this epidemic, especially of mass shootings, we need to actually talk about the guns and these guns that were made for battle.

They're high velocity, rapid fire assault weapons that were made to kill as many people as possible in close contact as possible. They do that. And they shouldn't be in our streets or in our grocery stores or in our school sanctuaries, as we experienced on August 27.

NINA MOINI: So your bill aims to define exactly which type of assault weapons would be banned, as I understand it. And there have been efforts to do this in the past. Those bills have not made it far. With a tied house this year, are you confident that there would be any bipartisan support, even one Republican who would support this or other measures related to banning assault weapons?

EMMA GREENMAN: Here's what I know. 69% of Minnesotans want us to ban assault weapons. 79% of Minnesotans in the suburbs want us to ban assault weapons. I have been hearing about this every day in my community from August 27. And I know from talking to my colleagues that they are hearing about it too. So if we are listening to Minnesotans, if we are listening to our constituents who are saying, choose us and not these guns-- I mean, I have sixth graders saying, chanting, I can't outrun a gun and saying, choose us, not these weapons. If we're listening, I think that there will be support.

Now as you said, we need one Republican member across the aisle to join us in listening to Minnesotans. I sure hope that happens, because again, if we are doing our jobs, outside the dome, this is not a controversial issue. There are very few things that 69, 70% of Minnesotans ask with one voice for us to do. They're asking us to do this. And I hope that my GOP colleagues across the aisle listen to Minnesotans.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, we have heard that 70% statistic from a recent Marist poll, other polls that are out there. What do you say to gun owners in Minnesota who are concerned about their rights or they feel that this policy might interfere with perhaps hunting rifles? Does your bill list out exactly what types of assault weapons or what types of weapons would be banned so that people can go and look?

EMMA GREENMAN: It does. And in fact, we are not the first state to do this. In fact, the federal government had a ban for 10 years. We would follow-- I think we would be 12 in states that have passed possession and sales bans like this and the certification process for legacy weapons. These are tailored to weapons that were designed for warfare and that either have the features or were actually the weapons that were designed for the military.

And so this does not affect your hunting rifle. It does not affect your Glock. And there's lots of conversations about safe storage and other things for people who are legally owning those handguns. What this is about is specifically, those high velocity, rapid fire weapons with detachable magazine capacities that are wreaking havoc and that are built-- they were designed for the battlefield to kill as many people as possible.

So you can go in the bill. You can see what weapons are specifically and what features are specifically included. And again, they're based on the long experience of states around the country and the federal government working with firearms experts of, what are those features that make these concealable, particularly lethal, and particularly suited for the battlefield, which are not suited to be in our neighborhoods.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, House File 3433, looks like. We'll link to it as well at mprnews.org. Can we talk a little bit about penalties? Would there be any sort of a transition period for weapon owners who might be on that list? And then what would the penalties be?

EMMA GREENMAN: Yeah so this follows again, like many other states we've learned from their experience there's a certification process. So if you have one of these weapons before the possession and sale ban would go into effect, you can get it certified. You can certify that you're keeping it and using it legally. And then you can keep that weapon. And the penalties follow the similar penalties for other gun laws that we have on the books. But make no mistake. What Minnesotans are asking us to do is get these weapons that were made for war off our streets. And so the enforcement, once this goes into effect, there is time.

There's both time for transition. There is the allowance of these legacy weapons that folks currently own. And also, there is an enforcement mechanism built in so that we ensure that we are keeping people safe, and we are doing what Minnesotans are asking us to do, which is ensure that these weapons that were made for war are not terrorizing our kids and our communities.

NINA MOINI: Some of the parents that I've spoken with from Annunciation have conveyed that they really feel that if they sit down with people face to face and tell their stories and pour their hearts out, that that will move people, but that it might take a long time. I'm curious to how much the stories of these survivors and surviving families and the people so deeply impacted have shaped your proposal.

EMMA GREENMAN: What I will say is the courage and the resilience and the compassion that these families who have suffered too-- we've lost two beautiful kids and dozens more who are dealing with the physical injuries and then hundreds who are dealing with the trauma of living through those two minutes. The fact that these families and these kids are both engaged in how to make the world safer and better for folks who come after them drives me. It roots me deeply in what can be a controversial and really--

There's some really ugly advocacy from on the other side. The gun industry, the gun lobby has figured out how to weaponize these politics. But if we stay rooted in Minnesotans and the stories of people who are impacted, we have heard from folks around the state, and frankly, around the country. Our Annunciation parents are so brave and courageous. And they follow a long line of parents and families and students who are actually standing up to try to make change on this and who have said, we don't have to accept the reality that the next community is going to be terrorized like we were. We can change things for the better.

And so for me, and I hope for all my colleagues, we will stand in that courage and that resilience and say we will do what's right and what will make people safer and what will make our kids safer and listen to these sixth graders who are telling us, choose us and not these weapons. If we do that, I think we will be on strong, solid ground in the state of Minnesota.

NINA MOINI: Representative Greenman, thanks for your time today.

EMMA I really appreciate the conversation.

GREENMAN:

NINA MOINI: Thank you. That was DFL Minnesota State Representative Emma Greenman.