

By Adele Colson, Congregation Shaarey Zedek – East Lansing, MI; Member of NFTY's National Gun Violence Prevention Board

Hello, fellow congregants, and our NFTY teens joining us tonight. For those of you who don't know, my name is Adele Colson. I am GLTY's Programming Vice President and I'm a member of NFTY's National Gun Violence Prevention Board. As some of you may know, some of the religious school teens from Shaarey Zedek had the opportunity to attend the L'Taken Social Justice Seminar in Washington DC, with the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, the RAC. I was one of the 500 Jewish teens across the U.S. fortunate enough to attend. There we learned about important topics and what Reform Judaism has to say about them. From our congregation specifically we talked about Immigration, Women's Reproductive rights and Gun Violence Prevention. We then wrote speeches and lobbied in Congress urging our legislators to take action or to sponsor certain bills. I lobbied on the topic of gun violence prevention, something that has always spoken to me because of how close to home and prevalent it has always felt. The Talmud teaches us that "he who takes one life it is as though he has destroyed the universe and he who saves one life it is as though he has saved the universe," and Leviticus teaches us "Do not stand idly by while your neighbors blood is shed." This means that while kids are being killed in schools that we can't turn the other cheek and ignore the problem, we must peacefully fight for their lives and make our voices heard. These teachings remind us that we have a duty as a Jewish people to help others who cannot fight for themselves. While the Reform Movement has taken a specific stance on this issue, you can still be a good Reform Jew while respectfully disagreeing with the Reform stance.

Two days after lobbying in Congress for safer gun legislation and background checks, was the Parkland shooting. Even though our legislators listened, nothing was done, as if they were listening but not hearing us, but this made me realize how important it is to be apart of the political process and not give up. I will continue to speak out until my voice is thoroughly heard. Tomorrow I will be continuing my mission for change and sharing my voice by being the closing speaker at our local Lansing March at the Capitol. But today I urge you all to share your own voices and be a part of the legislative process, you can do this by sending an email to congress, calling your legislators or getting involved in events like the local March tomorrow from 10am-12pm. It begins at the Michigan Hall of Justice in downtown Lansing, and we will march to the state capitol. I hope to see you all at the March tomorrow, to support a cause that means a lot to me as a reform Jew, a teen and as a person. When we are united for a cause, nothing can stop us. Thank you and happy advocating.