At least one state organization, a congressman and a mayor are calling for stricter gun laws in wake of the tragic massacre of 26 people – 20 of them children – that occurred in Connecticut.

Though those calling for stricter gun laws have been doing so long before the Dec. 14 mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., they say the latest incident is just another example of this nation's need for action. Locally, according to a spokesperson for Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak, the mayor is demanding tougher legislation.

"Children should not have to live in an environment where gun violence common," said John Stiles, communications director for Mayor Rybak. "People have to understand the power and deadliness of guns."

Stiles said the mayor is a long-standing member of Mayors Against Illegal Guns, an advocacy group of mayors formed by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, to prevent criminals from illegally obtaining guns. He said of the simplest of things to do is to ban assault weapons such as the one used in the Connecticut shooting and to close the loophole that allows anyone to legally purchase a firearm at gun shows without a criminal or mental history background check.

"Forty percent of all guns are purchased without any background check whatsoever," said Stiles. "The mayor believes we've got to close that loophole. And the mayor wants to have a law enacted to have gun owners report any gun that has been lost or stolen. When a car is stolen, you've got report it; it should be the same for guns. Clearly we have a problem."

Just this past September, Minneapolis was the scene of a mass shooting when an armed former employee of Accent Signage Systems killed five and wounded three others before killing himself with a legally purchased handgun. In the wake of the most recent mass shooting, the son of one of the Minneapolis victims, Sammy Rahamim, whose father, Reuven Rahamim, was killed in the attack, appeared together with Bloomberg this past Monday (Dec. 17) to speak out for stricter gun legislation.

Also, according to Stiles, Rybak has called for an end to the prohibition of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms officials to communicate with local law enforcement agencies regarding guns and gun crime.

Heather Martens, executive director of Protect Minnesota said the latest in a string of national gun tragedies yells for legislative action.

"I hope there will now be political will to enact the gun violence prevention measures we've been calling for," said Martens. "I'm sorry it had to come to something like this for people to finally get some resolve."

Joan Peterson of Protect Minnesota agrees.

"We always knew the majority of people wanted what we wanted (in terms of stricter gun laws), but we couldn't get elected leaders to act because of fear of the NRA (National Rifle Association)," said Peterson. "Now you see people like Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, who

is A-Rated by the NRA, said that something needs to be done, so there's hope."

Peterson lost her sister, Barbara Lund, to gun violence 20 years ago.

"Why would anyone be against reasonable gun control laws," Peterson questioned. "We have to ask our elected officials who they are going to be held accountable to, the citizens or the NRA."

Insight News contacted Minnesota NRA field representative Scott Lembke for comment on this story, but Lembke declined an interview and referred Insight to the national NRA. A call was placed to the national body, but the individual who answered the call would not comment and said she would try and have someone return the call. At the time this story went to press, the call to the NRA was not returned.

Fifth District Congressman Keith Ellison said there is a reason for the NRA's silence.

"It's because the position it takes is wrong and morally bankrupt," said Ellison. "(The NRA) says any restriction on guns will lead to a ban on all guns and that's absurd. There are many responsible gun owners – hunters; and they know that no one is out there hunting game spraying them with (rounds from) high capacity clips."

Areas schools review safety in wake of shooting

Some area school districts are reviewing their safety policies and procedures in wake of the Sandy Hook shooting.

Jason Matlock, director of emergency management, safety and security for the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) said the district has written procedures in place and staff and students are drilled on what to do in such a crisis. Matlock said currently, visitors either must buzz in or be greeted by school personnel to be allow entrance into any of the district's schools.

"Our policy is a living document, so nothing is written in stone, and we will look at it to see if things can be learned from what happened in Connecticut," said Matlock. "Nothing is ever 100 percent perfect, but we've got a lot of well-trained people who do good work in keeping students safe."

Matlock said many of the details of the Sandy Hook shooting are still being sorted out, thus he wants to get a clearer understanding of the incident before making any adjustments to the MSP safety plan.

In St. Paul, on the public school district's website it posted the following message:

"SPPS (St. Paul Public Schools) is shocked and saddened by the shooting that took place in Connecticut. Our thoughts go out to all involved. We want to assure our families and the community that student safety is of paramount importance in our district. We take every precaution, every day. Our own security officers and uniformed Saint Paul Police officers patrol our schools daily. Our Security and Emergency Management Department is in constant

communication with local law enforcement and public safety partners. More information on safety in Saint Paul Public Schools is available at safety.spps.org."

At least one congressperson and one Missouri police chief suggest arming teachers to keep students safe.

"I think that's absurd," said Martens, who was once herself an educator. "What we need to do is make sure people with mental illness don't have access to high powered weapons. How ridiculous is it for a kindergarten teacher to be carrying a gun around? And what makes you think 'Mrs. Jones' is going to be able to get off a clear shot in a real life situation? It's ridiculous. It boggles the mind."

Martens wondered what would happen if a child were to get a hold of a teacher's gun. Peterson wondered the same thing.

"Where's a teacher going to keep the gun – in a holster, in a desk drawer, in a file cabinet," questioned Peterson, who was also a teacher. "What a teacher should do (in a crisis situation) is get the children to safety, away from the shooter and keep the children safe and calm, not try and face down a shooter."

Matlock said having guns in schools is not a favored approach.

"That's a huge undertaking, having guns around our kids at all times," said Matlock, who was a police officer for six years. "There's just no quick fix here."