UNH Students Stage Walk-Out Vigil in Response to Lewiston Shootings

“Thoughts and prayers aren’t going to do anything, what we need is community,” said Abigail Kincaid

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University New Hampshire (UNH) students staged a walkout and vigil Thursday, October 26, in wake of the mass shootings that occurred Wednesday in Lewiston, Maine. The vigil was held at 1 P.M. on the Great Lawn at Thompson Hall (T-Hall) and included speakers Michael Blackman, UNH dean of students, members of the UNH Chaplain and Spiritual Life Association and various UNH students who volunteered their thoughts. The event was organized by fourth-year student Kai Parlett, and first-year student Abigail Kincaid.

On Wednesday evening a shooting rampage occurred at a bowling alley and a restaurant in Lewiston, Maine that left 18 dead and 13 injured, as reported by CNN. Police urged residents of Lewiston to shelter in place as a search was ongoing for days until the suspected gunman was found.

The prime suspect of the shooting is 40-year-old Robert Card of Bowdoin who was a certified firearms instructor and member of the U.S. Army Reserves. Card was found dead Friday evening from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Numerous schools across southern Maine were closed from Wednesday to Friday before Card's body was found.

Plans for holding a vigil at UNH took shape Wednesday night almost immediately after Parlett and Kincaid heard of the shooting.

“We picked a time then threw together a flier and sent it to every single person we each knew,” said Kincaid.

Parlett said that she attached the flier to an email she sent to all members of UNH administration. The flier stated, “We are gathering... to create a space for processing and to express our solidarity with the UNH community.” The flier was posted to the social media of Kincaid and Parlett, and reposted by various UNH students and organizations.

At the start of the vigil there were speeches by Parlett and Kincaid, along with a moment of silence for the victims and their families of Lewiston.

“I've been sick to my stomach all year,” said Kincaid in her speech. “Thoughts and prayers aren't going to do anything, what we need is community.”
Parlett emphasized the current need of hospitals in the Seacoast area to receive blood donations for the victims of Lewiston.

Parlett and Kincaid brought a poster board to the vigil for anyone who wanted to write messages for those affected by the shootings including the students of Bates College, who had been sheltering in place since Wednesday night. The microphone was opened up to anyone who wished to come up and speak on the tragedy.

Abby Kincaid, one of the organizer’s of the vigil, spoke out on her horror of the shooting. (Sarah Donovan).

One of the speakers at the event was Michael Blackman, dean of students.

“This might not be a time to spend all night till three or four in the morning staring at your phone watching what's happening. It's okay to take a step back,” he said. “This is a time to lean into your friends a little bit more, check in with people.”
Various students came up to the microphone one by one to share their messages for those affected by the shooting, as well as their own thoughts and feelings. Among the students who spoke at the vigil was first-year Hayden Anderson. The first thing Anderson said when he got up to speak was a thank you to everyone for coming out to the vigil.

Anderson was at his house in Gorham, Maine when the shooting happened 45 minutes away. He shared that his father was at the center of Lewiston when the shooting was active.

“As a kid I went there [to Lewiston] to play youth soccer games with my team and family. I drive through there every once in a while and to have something so horrifying happen in a place so familiar rattles you to your core,” said Anderson. He shared that he feels safe on the UNH campus with the heightened police presence.

Second-year student Sabrina Allan stated that everybody knows someone affected by the tragedy in Lewiston. She and Parlett shared that they had friends who had to shelter in place at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine.

First-year student Issy Aguiar felt that UNH was slower to respond than other communities that sent out emails as the shooting was happening. UNH did not send out an email about the shooting until the next day. Paul Dean, the UNH chief of police and vice president for public safety and risk management sent out an email Thursday afternoon about the heightened police presence on campus and resources for students, faculty and staff who are seeking support at this time. He stated that UNH will heighten their police presence on campus until the shooter is apprehended. UNH President James Dean has not sent out an email pertaining to the shooting or student concerns at this time.

“The admin should have sent something out Thursday morning,” said Parlett. “Having something so traumatic happen in a community so interconnected with ours and then getting complete radio silence from the university isn’t okay.”

Parlett stated that she hopes the vigil helped people process together and created a sense of community despite the trauma and fear a lot of people are experiencing right now.
In New Hampshire the right to bear arms is protected by the U.S. constitution, and there is no minimum age for possessing a firearm. New Hampshire residents are also not required to register their guns. However only a parent or guardian can transfer a gun to someone under the age of 18. In Maine gun owners are not required to be permitted while carrying a firearm, and no background checks are required upon purchase of a handgun.

Kincaid discussed her opinion on how the U.S. can prevent mass shootings from happening in the future.

“We deserve to feel safe. Common sense gun laws and better access to mental healthcare are two starting points for making our communities safer and tackling this very big problem,” she said. “Kids shouldn’t have to risk their lives just going to school, families shouldn’t have to risk their lives going to the grocery store. The problem is the guns and it always has been. Let’s invest in the safety and wellbeing of communities.”

At the end of the vigil Parlett and Kincaid emphasized the importance of conducting grassroots events on campus to evoke political change. Grassroots events is a term for building something from the ground up. Grassroot event planning is often done by everyday people who would like to evoke change on a particular issue.

“Grassroots event organizing is in my opinion one of the most critical parts of political organizing. Anyone can grassroots organize,” said Kincaid. “I think events like these are important to build community and solidarity but also to mobilize people into action. A lot of people care about things like gun violence for example but don’t know how to get involved in advocacy work. Events like these are a perfect gateway.”
“Those impacted by this event have the entirety of my empathy and sympathy,” said Anderson. “This is not fair. This is not deserved. No one deserves treatment so inhumane, and no one deserves to have zero action taken as a result of this. Every roaring fire starts with a small spark; with a few small voices we can create immense change.”

24/7 resources for students, faculty and staff seeking support at this time are listed below with their corresponding phone numbers.

UNH faculty and staff through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP): 800.424.174, Durham students through Psychological and Counseling Services (PACS): 603.862.2090, Manchester students through the Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester: 603.668.4111, law students through Riverbend Community Mental Health: 603.228.1600, Online students through Kepro (code: cps): 844.205.3446.

Pastor Lillian Jane Buckley of the Student Life Chaplain and Spiritual Life Association holds a candle in unity with the other students, faculty and community members during the moment of silence. (Sarah Donovan).