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People attend a vigil at Jug Tavern Park in Winder, Ga., Sept. 4, 2024, following a shooting that day at Apalachee High School in Winder. A 14-year-old student opened fire at the school killing at least two teachers and two students, authorities said. (OSV News/Elijah Nouvelage, Reuters)

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Atlanta — September 5, 2024

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The Catholic bishops of Atlanta prayed "for healing and strength" for those injured during a Sept. 4 mass shooting at Apalachee High School in Winder, Georgia, where the alleged shooter, 14-year-old Colt Gray, is alive and in custody. According to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, at least four people were killed and at least nine injured requiring hospitalization.

In a joint statement late Sept. 4, Archbishop Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv., of Atlanta, joined by the diocese's auxiliary bishops, said, "Our hearts ache for the lives that have been so cruelly cut short by this devastating tragedy."

"We grieve and pray with those who lost children and loved ones. We ask God for healing and strength for those who have been injured," they said. "And we invoke God's blessing on our first responders and medical personnel, especially during this traumatic time."

The bishops called the shooting "another grim reminder" that taking additional steps to prevent gun violence "cannot wait for another tragedy to happen."

"Once again, we implore elected officials to work together, regardless of political or religious affiliation, to enact laws and provide services that will prevent the repetition of such tragedies," they said.

Chris Hosey, director of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, told reporters that two of the deceased were teachers and two were students. Hosey said Gray has been charged with murder and will be prosecuted as an adult.

Apalachee High School will be closed for the rest of the week, said the superintendent, as the school district cooperates with law enforcement.

In an initial statement, the Barrow County Sheriff's Office said authorities were dispatched to the school when officers from multiple law enforcement agencies responded to a reported active shooting that morning.

The school is located nearly 50 miles outside of Atlanta. A spokesperson for that city's Grady Health System told CNN the hospital was treating at least one gunshot victim from the school, who was transported to them by helicopter.

Gov. Brian Kemp, R-Ga., wrote in a post on X that he has "directed all available state resources to respond to the incident at Apalachee High School." He also urged "all Georgians to join my family in praying for the safety of those in our classrooms, both in Barrow County and across the state."

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A spokesperson for the White House said President Joe Biden has been briefed by his Homeland Security Advisor, Liz Sherwood-Randall, "on the tragic shooting at Apalachee High School in Winder, Georgia and his administration will continue coordinating with federal, state, and local officials as we receive more information."

In a statement, Biden said, "Jill and I are mourning the deaths of those whose lives were cut short due to more senseless gun violence and thinking of all of the survivors whose lives are forever changed."

"What should have been a joyous back-to-school season in Winder, Georgia, has now turned into another horrific reminder of how gun violence continues to tear our communities apart," Biden said. "Students across the country are learning how to duck and cover instead of how to read and write. We cannot continue to accept this as normal."

Biden said his administration is "closely coordinating with officials at the federal, state and local level," and he is "grateful for the first responders who brought the suspect into custody and prevented further loss of life."

"Ending this gun violence epidemic is personal to me," Biden said, noting he signed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which he called "the most meaningful gun safety bill in decades," as well as other executive action on gun violence.

"We've made significant progress, but this crisis requires even more," he said, calling on Republicans and Democrats to work together and "pass common-sense gun safety legislation" after decades of gridlock on the issue.

"We must ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines once again, require safe storage of firearms, enact universal background checks, and end immunity for gun manufacturers," Biden said. "These measures will not bring those who were tragically killed today back, but it will help prevent more tragic gun violence from ripping more families apart."

The high school was in session just one month when the shooting took place.

Last year, the Catholic bishops of the Atlanta province signed a joint statement June 27, 2023, urging "decisive action" by federal and state officials to implement meaningful legislation addressing the "plague of gun violence" nationwide and locally. The bishops said the "ready accessibility of firearms presents an immediate threat to the wellbeing of children," and called on lawmakers to prevent them "from falling into the hands of those who would carry out violent acts against children in schools, against their families or against themselves."

This story appears in the **Gun Violence** feature series. [View the full series.](#)