

Bridging the Divide on Firearms Policy

Project Report

February 2026

The views and activities of Bridging the Divide on Firearm Policy and its members are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Tufts University.

Overview

We live at a time of increasing polarization on many issues that affect the lives of all Americans. One of the most polarizing issues of our time is gun ownership. However, it doesn't have to be this way. The Bridging the Divide on Firearm Policy project has demonstrated that if people from opposite sides of an issue come together for respectful dialogue, a willingness to listen to each other, and a desire to change the world, polarization can be overcome. And if we can do this with the issue of gun violence, we can do this for many other controversial policy issues.

The field of gun violence prevention is typically viewed as a highly polarized space with two sides—gun owners and non-gun owners—that are at an insurmountable impasse. We know that state firearm policies can greatly lower the rate of gun violence, but state policy makers are hesitant to enact such laws because of a perceived divide between gun owners and non-gun owners. **This perceived divide, however, is greatly exaggerated.** Over the past seven years, research conducted by our team at the Tufts University School of Medicine has discovered a huge area of common ground between gun owners and non-gun owners—large enough to serve as the foundation for a platform of state-level firearm policies that would be highly effective in reducing gun violence. Unfortunately, the level of engagement among gun owners on this topic is very low, mainly because they have simply **not been included in the conversation** around firearm violence and have not been asked to contribute to the formulation of effective firearm policies. As a result, there is yet to be a gun violence prevention policy platform conceived that protects public safety while garnering the support of gun owners needed for enactment in the majority of states across the nation.

A core principle of our project was the inclusion of gun owners in the development of a firearm policy platform to ensure that the resulting platform includes provisions that takes their unique needs and concerns into account and is thus capable of garnering their support and advocacy in state legislatures. In framing this project, we had faith in the promise that because of the common ground between gun owners and non-gun owners on policy issues, coupled with a professionally mediated deliberation approach it would be possible for our participants to reach agreement on a firearm policy platform.

Through this project, the panel of gun owners and non-gun owners across the ideological spectrum that we assembled created a policy roadmap that was developed through a facilitated dialogue that included approximately 70 hours of virtual deliberation sessions as well as two weekend-long in-person conferences over the course of a year. The panel developed a platform of policies that we believe represents the strongest and most effective state-level strategy to reduce all forms of firearm injury. At the same time, we believe that this policy platform respects the constitutional and due process rights of gun

owners, interferes minimally with the ability of gun owners to acquire, possess, store, and use firearms for self-defense or any other legal purpose, and in fact, actually reduces some of the current burdens and liability that gun owners face. The package is made up of eight policies, each addressing a particular reality of firearms. The policies are as follows.

1. Prohibiting Factors for Firearm Purchase and Possession
2. Background Checks
3. Extreme Risk Protection Order
4. Dealer Regulation and Gun Trafficking
5. Child Firearm Access Prevention and Responsible Gun Storage
6. Firearm Suicide Prevention
7. Firearm Injury Prevention Education
8. Community Violence Intervention

We hope that the success of this project will lead to the implementation of our policy roadmap across a myriad of states and will help move the broader discussion of firearm policy from a zero-sum game with two highly polarized sides, to a carefully crafted middle ground that both maximizes public health protections and minimizes interference with lawful gun owners. Likewise, we hope that this project will reframe the debate from gun owners vs. non-gun owners, to the public—gun owners and non-gun owners alike- vs. the problem of firearm violence that affects all of us.

Mission, Vision & Focus

Guiding Principles

Our policy platform, widely approved by a wide spectrum of stakeholders, addresses gun violence prevention while protecting constitutional rights.

We believe that our work over the past year has demonstrated that gun policy does not have to be a zero-sum game, demonstrating that a set of policies acceptable to a wide range of stakeholders in the gun rights and gun violence prevention field alike, can be created and passed.

Our Shared Principles

- The decision of people to responsibly own and use firearms must be respected.
- It is possible and necessary to simultaneously work to reduce gun-related harm and respect the rights of gun owners.
- The focus of firearm policy should be keeping firearms out of the hands of people who are at risk for harming themselves or others, while interfering as little as possible with the constitutional rights of citizens.
- The focus should be on the adoption of policies for which there is compelling evidence of effectiveness.
- Policies should be designed to reduce gun-related harms, including homicide, suicide, and all types of gun-related injuries.
- Policies should address the well-documented disparities in gun-related harms affecting Black and Brown communities.
- Gaining the support and investment of the gun-owning community is necessary and can be done without compromising public safety.

Background

The Current Gun Violence Prevention Movement

The current gun violence prevention movement is at a stalemate. Federally, no action is being taken on this issue, nor is there likely to be. At the state level, there is currently no cohesive legislative platform geared toward state policy capable of garnering momentum among most states. From 1991 to 2024, 23 states have either rolled back existing gun violence prevention provisions or seen no change in their policy landscape. Out of a total of 72 policy provisions tracked by the State Firearm Laws Database, 22 states currently have five or less firearm provisions in place, while a minority of deeply blue states have over 40; California alone has 62 provisions in place.¹

There are two critical limitations of the current gun violence prevention movement that are impeding its ability to push forward effective gun policies and that help explain the gap in legislation among different states. First, the movement lacks a unified platform of gun policies. Currently, gun violence prevention organizations are supporting and promoting a myriad of specific laws, but not all groups are on the same page. Some are promoting assault weapon bans as a primary solution to gun violence, others are focusing on background checks, and still others on red flag laws, firearm permits, one gun a month laws, and so forth. One reason the tobacco control movement has been so effective is that virtually all organizations in that field have agreed upon a common, concise platform of tobacco policies that were uniformly pursued in all 50 states. The platform was simple: increase tobacco taxes, enact clean indoor air laws, reduce youth access to tobacco, and implement counter-advertising campaigns. Essentially every state was pursuing the same policy platform. However, no such platform exists in the gun violence prevention space.

The second major limitation of the current gun violence prevention movement is that it has given no attention to developing policies that provide any benefits to gun owners. In other words, the movement is promoting what is being perceived as a zero-sum game. New polling of American voters—conducted by NBC News in 2023—revealed that 52% of adults surveyed reported having a gun in their home.² This is the highest level of household gun ownership in this poll since its inception in 1999. With over half of U.S. households now

¹ Siegel, M. (2025, June 9). *State Firearm Law Database*. Tufts CTSI - Tufts Clinical and Translational Science Institute. <https://www.tuftsctsi.org/state-firearm-laws/>

² Marquez, A. (2023, November 21). *Poll: Gun ownership reaches record high with American electorate*. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/meetthepressblog/poll-gun-ownership-reaches-record-high-american-electorate-rcna126037>

having gun owners residing in them, gun violence prevention policies are unlikely to be enacted unless there is substantial support among the gun-owning community.

Research on Firearm Policies

Having conducted and reviewed research on the effects of both restrictive and permissive firearm policies over the course of four decades, we found that the centerpiece of any effective policy platform should be to keep firearms out of the hands of those with a history of or who are determined to be at a high risk of violence. The single greatest predictor for future violence is past violence. Violent misdemeanor laws, which prohibit gun possession by individuals convicted of a violent misdemeanor, have been implemented by six states as of 2023.³ These laws have been deemed highly effective in protecting public safety, as they have been shown to reduce the firearm homicide rate by up to 26.7%, and the total homicide rate by up to 19.3% in states that have implemented such laws.⁴

There is significant research showing that Extreme Risk Protection Orders are correlated with a 6.4% decrease in firearm suicide rates, and a 4% decrease in overall suicide rates, in states that have implemented them.⁵ Furthermore, the implementation of a firearm licensing system can reduce firearm homicide rates by up to 18.3%, and total homicide rates by⁶ Furthermore, it is the only policy we analyzed that correlated to fewer mass shooting instances. While high-capacity magazine bans may reduce the fatality rate of mass shootings, there is no evidence that such bans prevent such events.⁷ As for assault weapons bans, we found no evidence that such provisions have any effect on the occurrences of mass shooting events, nor their fatality rates.⁸

Based on our findings, we determined that the implementation of a policy package that combines violent misdemeanor laws, Extreme Risk Protection Orders, and a mechanism to determine if a prospective firearms purchaser is prohibited or not, may reduce overall suicides by 4% and overall homicides by as much as 28%.⁹ Our research shows that these

³ Siegel, M. (2025, June 9). *State Firearm Law Database*. Tufts CTSI - Tufts Clinical and Translational Science Institute. <https://www.tuftsctsi.org/state-firearm-laws/>

⁴ Boine, C., & Siegel, M. (2019, March 29). *What Are the Most Effective Policies in Reducing Gun Homicides?*. Rockefeller Institute of Government. <https://rockinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/8-13-19-Firearm-Laws-Homicide-Brief.pdf>

⁵ Rachel Delafave, *An Empirical Assessment of Homicide and Suicide Outcomes with Red Flag Laws*, 52 Loy. U. Chi. L. J. 867 (2021).

⁶ Siegel M. (2025, Aug 1) *Universal Background Checks, Permit Requirements, and Firearm Homicide Rates*. JAMA Network Open.

⁷ Siegel *et al*

⁸ Siegel, M., Goder-Reiser, M., Duwe, G., Rocque, M., Fox, J. A., & Fridel, E. E. (2020). The relation between state gun laws and the incidence and severity of mass public shootings in the United States, 1976–2018.

⁹ Grene *et al*

are the three most effective provisions in reducing gun violence and must be included in some form in any policy package.

Beliefs of Gun Owners

In a 2022 study, our team surveyed 1,078 nationally representative gun owners in an attempt to identify their views on specific gun policies, and the principles underlying their beliefs. The survey identified three major areas of common ground between the majority of gun owners and non-gun owners.

- The public – gun owners and non-gun owners alike – is concerned about the high levels of gun violence, including both mass public shootings and everyday urban gun violence, and they want to personally do something about it.
- The public – gun owners and non-gun owners alike – believes that there is no inherent conflict between the Constitutional protection of gun rights and the imposition of restrictions designed to keep guns out of the hands of people who are at high risk for violence.
- The public – gun owners and non-gun owners alike – believe that people who are at a high risk for violence, especially by virtue of having previously committed a violent crime, should not be able to access guns.

Gun owners will support laws that aim to keep guns out of the hands of people at high risk for violence, as long as those laws do not significantly interfere with the ability of law-abiding gun owners to purchase and possess the guns of their choice for self-protection, recreation, or any other legal purpose. On the other hand, gun owners will not support laws that restrict the types of guns that are available on the market, or which ban types of guns or ammunition that are currently in wide use. Critically, we have determined that laws restricting some guns for all people have minimal to no effect on public safety, while laws restricting all guns to some people (those at a risk of violence) yield significant public safety benefits.

Importantly, gun owners' support for laws intended to keep guns out of the hands of people who are at a high risk for violence is conditional upon the specific provisions of the actual legislation that is proposed. Their chief concerns relate to the following three areas.

1. The protection of the ability of law-abiding gun owners to access firearms: In particular, gun owners are concerned about accessibility to and convenience of obtaining and maintaining guns, including:
 - a. receiving a timely response when undergoing a background check;
 - b. the ability to sell or lend guns to family members without having to go through the burden of traveling to a licensed gun dealer and without the risk of committing a felony if they are in a situation where it is not feasible to obtain a background check;
 - c. the potential for bias in decisions about whether to approve or deny a concealed carry permit in states where law enforcement officials have discretion in making these decisions; and
 - d. expeditious return of guns to people subject to an extreme risk protection order when that order expires.
 - e. the cost of a potential gun permit, and the ability to apply for such a permit online;
2. The fairness of implementation of these laws, including:
 - a. providing a timely due process hearing before taking away an individual's guns for an extended period of time; and
 - b. penalizing people who vindictively or falsely accuse a gun owner of being a danger in order to subject them to an extreme risk protection order.
3. The ability to access firearms quickly when needed for self-defense, including:
 - a. forcing gun owners to store their guns in a manner that makes it infeasible to rely on these weapons for self-defense; and
 - b. unnecessarily burdening gun owners in situations where there is not a risk of a minor accessing their guns.

The Role of Identity in Polarization

Despite the significant level of common ground existing between gun owners and non-gun owners across the ideological spectrum, in the political and media spotlight it seems that the two groups have taken diametrically opposed positions. In response to tragic shootings, many activists have placed the blame for America's gun violence problem directly on gun owners and "gun culture" itself, calling for a ban on all guns, for the repeal of the Second Amendment, and even for the elimination of all high school sports shooting programs. On the other side, many gun owners object to these attacks strongly: they point to a failure on the part of activists to respect gun owners and to recognize and accept elements of gun cultures – such as hunting, target shooting, and gun collecting – as legitimate and culturally meaningful. These feelings of alienation have made it easier for

interest groups that profit off this polarization to convince many gun owners that they are being scapegoated and that the activists' ultimate goal is to take away their guns entirely and to destroy their Second Amendment rights.

Gun rights and gun violence prevention stakeholders alike have fallen victim to the perception gap, in which their perceived level of disagreement between these two groups is much higher than the reality. The perception gap between Democrats and Republicans, which can serve as an explanatory level for interparty hostility and polarization, remains wide; it has been reported that both parties imagine that almost twice as many people on the other side hold extreme views than actually do.¹⁰ The same report showed that consumption of most forms of media- talk radio, newspapers, local news, and social media,- was associated with a wider perception gap, posited to be because the rise of media outlet options that citizens can choose to consume has inevitably led to the diminishing of a common narrative within a society. With this “explosion of choice” in the media that one can choose to consume, they often gravitate toward the most “congenial option.” As for social media, the algorithm will keep individuals within their own “filter bubbles¹¹.”

A new school of thought that has developed over the past few years suggests that conflicts in social identity explain the observed political divide more than actual policy positions or meaningful differences in underlying beliefs and principles, a theory which can help explain the wide perception gap between the two main parties. As Seth David Radwell suggests in his 2021 book *American Schism*, the political divide is characterized more by “identity battles” than by conflicts in policy positions or fundamental principles. In his book *Why We’re Polarized*, Ezra Klein makes a similar point in arguing that the political divide is primarily one over identity and much less over actual policy: “One reason policy is not the driver of political disagreement is most people don’t have very strong views about policy...but all of us are experts on our own identities” (Klein 73-74)¹².

Klein cites research showing that “there’s only a weak relationship between how much a person identifies as a conservative or liberal and how conservative or liberal their views actually are—to be exact, in both cases it’s about a 0.25 correlation” (Klein 73-74)¹². He also writes of findings by Geoffrey Cohen which demonstrated that people can be persuaded to support almost any policy position as long as it is endorsed by their political

¹⁰ Yudkin, D., Hawkins, S., Dixon, T. (2019). The Perception Gap: How False Impressions are Pulling Americans Apart. *More in Common*

¹¹ Fishkin, J., Siu, A., Diamond, L., Bradburn, N. Is Deliberation an Antidote to Extreme Partisan Polarization? Reflections on “America in One Room.” *American Political Science Review*. 2021;115(4):1464-1481.

¹² Klein, E. (2020). *Why We’re Polarized*. Simon & Schuster.

party, even if it is inconsistent with that party's traditional position. Cohen writes of his findings, "For both liberal and conservative participants, the effect of reference group information overrode that of the policy content...Once the policy was socially defined as liberal or conservative, the persuasive impact of its objective content was reduced to nil"¹³. This is another demonstration that the political divide is an identity divide and that common ground is entirely possible if one looks beyond identity and explores fundamental principles.

Our findings on the beliefs of gun owners demonstrate that the conflict between gun owners and gun violence prevention advocates is not rooted in policy or value differences, as there is significant agreement within these two groups on these fronts. Instead, we contend that this polarization is primarily rooted in social identity conflict, as described above by both Radwell and Klein.

¹³ Cohen, G. L. (2003). Party Over Policy: The Dominating Impact of Group Influence on Political Beliefs. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(5), 808–822.

Conceptual Basis

The premise of our project was the belief that the shared principles between gun owners and gun violence prevention advocates, identified in our earlier research, is sufficient for the creation of a state-level firearm policy that both addresses gun owners' concerns and is consistent with what empirical and conceptual research has shown to be effective in protecting public safety. To test this hypothesis, we convened a nationally represented panel group of twenty-three gun violence prevention leaders and gun rights leaders, representing various stakeholders, for a yearlong process of professionally mediated discourse, with the end goal being to craft an actionable roadmap that all states can follow to reduce gun violence, particularly in states for which this has not been made a legislative priority.

The basis of our approach stems from a revival of interest in deliberative democracy, this time geared toward the public rather than elected officials. There is a growing body of empirical research on deliberative microcosms known as “minipublics,” designed to engage a sample of the public to discuss ideas based on merit rather than identity.¹⁴

The only way to successfully confront the current political divide is to return to debates about ideas. As written by Radwell in *American Schism*, “However painful and divisive our current political environment, we must return to these types of debates about ideas in order to move forward”⁹ (Radwell 329). Research on minipublics support this assertion, with one such study bringing together 526 registered voters nationwide to deliberate on 47 specific policy proposals, with 26 such proposals being classified as highly polarizing, 19 of the 26 proposals to a statistically significant degree. We contend that what has been missing from the gun policy debate is a discussion of fundamental ideas about the principles that should underlie gun policy. We made such discussions the cornerstone of the deliberative process for our panel.

A prerequisite for success in this project was reframing firearm policy from a zero-sum game, where gains to public safety protections must come at the expense of freedom and convenience for gun owners, to a positive-sum game, where all stakeholders stand to gain. If a proposed policy provides no benefits to gun owners, they will have no logical incentive to even come to the negotiating table. Continuously framing gun policy as a game of winners and losers, where one group's needs will prevail over others, would only worsen the polarization on this issue. As Radwell writes, “in any zero-sum setting, individuals in each group develop feelings of prejudice and anger toward the out-group, as well as pride and loyalty toward in-group members”⁹ (Radwell 6).

¹⁴ Fishkin *et al*

We believe that our work over the past year has disproven the idea that gun policy is a zero-sum game, and have further demonstrated that when firearm policy creation is continuously framed as a positive-sum game, and when the focus during such discussions is placed on ideas rather than identities, a policy acceptable to various stakeholders can be created. In fact, our panel has come up with such a policy.

Dialogue and Facilitation Process

A foundational element of Essential Partner's Reflective Structured Dialogue process was a set of communication agreements, consistently named at the opening of each session and continually referenced as a shared guide for how participants would be in conversation together. These agreements were offered as a starting point, with panelists collectively given the opportunity to refine and finally consented to abide by.

- Communication Agreements
 - You may “Pass” or “pass for now” if you're not ready or don't wish to respond
 - Speak for yourself and from your own experience not on behalf of others
 - Honor time limits to ensure everyone has a chance to participate - when there are no time limits, be mindful of the amount of time you are speaking.
 - Please maintain confidentiality as to other people's stories but feel free to speak about your learning
 - Speak to be understood and not to persuade others
 - Speak one at a time, and take a breath between speakers

Facilitation Strategies

For more than 35 years, Essential Partners has held that durable progress through conflict depends on people being in relationship with one another. The facilitation strategy centered relationships as the primary vehicle for productive dialogue across difference. Instead of beginning with positions or policy debate, the strategy intentionally slowed the work to build trust and mutual understanding among participants. This included 1:1 pre-session interview with each panelist to surface their individual purpose, history with the issue, and prior challenges they have experienced in trying to have this conversation, all to inform a process design that aimed to support their participation and disrupt known destructive patterns within the firearms conversation. The first panel session focused entirely on relationship-building and orienting participants to the purposes of the work ahead, while the second centered on story-sharing, inviting participants to explore the experiences and values that shaped their beliefs about firearms and safety, as well as areas of tension or uncertainty within their own beliefs. Throughout the project, relational dynamics were reinforced through “connecting before content” and small ‘homeroom’ groups that deepened familiarity over time. Once this foundation was established, consent-based decision-making elements were introduced to support disciplined

listening, equitable participation, and collective sense-making, particularly when tensions arose. The facilitation team slowly transferred ownership of the working groups to the panelists to build momentum and buy-in when bringing proposals back to the full panel. Together, these strategies were implemented to increase participants' capacity to stay engaged, listen with resilience, and work generatively across deep differences.

Outcome

After a yearlong deliberative process, the project participants have successfully formulated a package of eight state-level firearm policies aimed at protecting public safety while securing the rights of firearm owners. All eight policies have been approved with broad consensus from the participants. The policies are as follows:

1. Prohibiting Factors for Firearm Purchase and Possession
2. Background Checks
3. Extreme Risk Protection Order
4. Dealer Regulation and Gun Trafficking
5. Child Firearm Access Prevention and Responsible Gun Storage
6. Firearm Suicide Prevention
7. Firearm Injury Prevention Education
8. Community Violence Intervention

The team strongly believes that these policies are most effective at protecting public safety if enacted as a package, as each policy focuses on a specific area contributing to firearm violence (i.e. Firearm suicides are addressed in the Firearm Suicide Prevention Policy, and firearm trafficking is addressed in the Dealer Regulation and Gun Trafficking Policy).

The team also finds it imperative to note that each policy contains certain trade-offs that have made them acceptable among both the gun rights and the gun violence prevention stakeholders within the project. If these policies are not considered in their entirety, and instead certain provisions within the policies favorable to only select stakeholders are cherry-picked, that would be a contradiction of the core principle underlying this project: that firearm legislation does not need to be a zero-sum game, and that protecting public safety can and should coexist with protecting gun rights. We also caution that such cherry-picking will severely undermine a policy's chance of passage in most states.

Policy Details

Prohibiting Factors for Firearm Purchase and Possession

Background

Federal law prohibits all individuals convicted of a felony of firearm ownership, regardless of the nature of the felony (whether it was a violent felony, or a nonviolent felony that may have no bearing on an individual's risk of violence). However, if an individual commits a violent crime but is charged and convicted at the misdemeanor level, they will face no barriers in purchasing and possessing firearms under federal law, despite consensus in research in public health and criminology that the greatest indicator of future violence is a history of past violence. Thus, a state-level violent misdemeanor law is the crux of this policy.

About the Policy

Eighteen states have implemented violent misdemeanor laws in some capacity, with only six of those states having these laws apply regardless of the length of imprisonment. Our policy not only implements laws prohibiting firearm purchase and possession for violent misdemeanor convictions regardless of the length of sentencing but also removes these prohibitions for non-violent felony convictions which are not shown to be precursors to violence.

Protection of Gun Rights

The policy is based on the philosophy that what is most needed is not prohibiting some guns for all people but prohibiting all guns from some people. Instead of striking gun rights from a wide swath of the public, many who are not at increased risk of violence, this proposal narrowly targets the group at highest risk: those previously convicted of a violent crime. The policy specifically states that under state law, an individual convicted of a non-violent felony (apart from certain crimes that are technically non-violent but are considered precursors to violence) is not prohibited from firearm ownership. It also provides protections to gun owners by imposing penalties on people who make false statements to try to unarm someone with whom they are in a relationship. The policy also protects gun owners by requiring the timely return of stored firearms when the period of prohibition expires.

Protection of Public Health

This policy adds substantial new gun violence prevention protections at the state level by explicitly addressing one of the most important weaknesses in federal law, the failure to prohibit gun possession by violent criminals who are charged with misdemeanors but not felonies. A history of violence is the single greatest risk factor for future violence and serves as the evidence foundation for this policy. This novel state policy ensures that all violent crimes—regardless of the disposition of the final offense—make a person prohibited from purchasing or possessing firearms. The policy covers all violent offenses, including--where relevant—stalking, cyberstalking, hate crimes, animal cruelty, and attempts to commit any of these crimes. The recommended periods of disqualification are based on the severity of the crime, and the most up-to-date research on recidivism.

Consent Tally

This proposal received the consent of 22 of the 23 panelists.

Background Checks

Background

The efficacy of the federal NICS background checks system is affected by the untimely and often inadequate reporting of state criminal records to the federal databases that make up the NICS system. Because of this, many prospective purchasers who should be prohibited are not flagged during a NICS check and are able to proceed with their purchase. This underscores the importance of instituting a state-based system to check whether a person is prohibited from firearms ownership prior to a transfer. In addition to providing the benefit of a much more comprehensive, sensitive, and efficient way to access records and determine whether there is a criminal history of violence, state background checks would likely be completed in a much timelier fashion, thus lowering the waiting period for transfer of a purchased firearm.

About the Policy

This policy sets up a system by which, for the first time ever, private gun sellers can conduct an immediate background check to determine whether a prospective buyer is prohibited or not. The policy also gives every gun owner a choice of how the background check is to be conducted. They can opt for a standard, state-level background check or they can take advantage of a new, automated approval check system by which any gun seller can access a computerized database of prohibited persons and immediately determine whether the prospective buyer is prohibited. In addition, the automated approval check system is instantly updated whenever a person is no longer prohibited, such as when an extreme risk protection order or domestic violence restraining order expires.

Protection of Gun Rights

The policy includes provisions that protect gun owners from unwittingly committing a felony if they lend a gun to a family member for a hunting trip or give a family member a gun as a gift. The law contains an exemption of a background check for certain temporary transfers, as well as for the sale or transfer of guns to what the law defines as “immediate family members,” and certain established responsible firearm owners-- active or retired law enforcement, certified firearm safety and shooting instructors, and paid and established members of the seller’s gun club, provided that the gun club meets certain provisions.

The policy includes safeguards aimed to prevent the unreasonable bureaucratic delays of a standard state-level background check: if such a check is not completed within three business days, law enforcement must justify the delay and give the prospective buyer an opportunity to provide clarity and any relevant documents. Upon receipt of any documents, state law enforcement will have an additional three business days to complete the check before the sale is allowed to proceed. Furthermore, due to the often-prohibitive costs of firearm safety training courses, this policy provides tax incentives for firearm owners who choose to undergo such training.

Protection of Public Health

This policy adds substantial new gun violence prevention protections at the state level by explicitly requiring, with minimal and specific exemptions, state-level background checks for the purchase or transfer of all firearms. State background checks provide the benefit of a much more comprehensive, sensitive, and efficient way to access records and determine whether there is a criminal history of violence than does solely relying on the NICS database. A state that enacts this policy will become one of only 15 in the nation to require state-level background checks for all gun purchases and transfers, with minor exceptions. This policy would also require that law enforcement be notified with immediacy when a prohibited person attempts to make a purchase and directs them to investigate the circumstance of the attempted sale. Perhaps most importantly, the policy sets up a first-in-the-nation system by which the state maintains a computerized list of prohibited persons that is instantly updated the moment a court ruling makes a person prohibited.

Consent Tally

This proposal received the unanimous consent of all 23 panelists.

Extreme Risk Protection Orders

Background

Extreme risk protection order laws help ensure that those who might not have a prohibiting legal history of violence but have been deemed to be at an imminent risk of committing harm to themselves or others, is restricted access to firearms until that threat has passed. These laws allow a subject's family members, law enforcement, or a non-law enforcement reporter to petition a court for the temporary removal of firearms for individuals deemed a threat to themselves or others. Research shows that extreme risk protection order laws can reduce the firearm suicide rate by up to 6.4% and the total suicide rate by up to 3.7% in states where they are implemented.

About the Policy

Our extreme risk protection order policy stands out with the sheer number of provisions aimed at protecting due process, helping alleviate a major concern of the gun community about such laws. Furthermore, while our policy focuses on the removal of firearms to those deemed at imminent risk of self-harm or harm to others, it also has provisions aimed at addressing and mitigating the factors underlying the subject's crises through the involvement of independent mental health professionals working alongside police.

Protection of Gun Rights

The policy is based on the philosophy that if a person is at imminent risk of causing harm to themselves or others, there is most likely a mental health issue involved, and it makes no sense to simply take away the person's guns but offer no other services. In this policy, every person served with a temporary extreme risk protection order is offered a free mental health examination with appropriate referral for mental health treatment if deemed appropriate. All such mental health treatment is free of charge as long as the order is in effect. For people thought to be a risk to themselves, a crisis intervention plan is developed in conjunction with a mental health professional working with law enforcement.

There are multiple due process protections for subjects, including the right to appeal for early termination of a final extreme risk protection order if the person can show that they are no longer a risk to themselves or others. There is a penalty for anyone who uses the extreme risk protection order process to harass a gun owner and provides false information in a petition. There is a provision for free storage of guns for any temporary extreme risk protection order subject who is subsequently not found to pose an imminent risk to themselves or others. Finally, the policy requires that an evidentiary hearing be held within

two weeks of a temporary order, that it be held within 2 days if the subject is required to carry firearms for work, that firearms be returned within 2 days following the expiration of an extreme risk protection order, and includes safeguards to ensure that such timelines be enforced. Furthermore, all subjects of an extreme risk protection order will be given resources to contact attorneys and public defenders that have shown an interest in defending such cases.

The policy also addresses the concern that the presence of an extreme risk protection order law may dissuade gun owners from seeking mental health treatment by making it clear that the act of seeking such treatment may not be used as the basis of an extreme risk protection order petition, and by establishing a cultural competency training curriculum for mental health professionals to help them better understand the importance of firearms in the lives of their patients.

Protection of Public Health

This policy includes a comprehensive extreme risk protection order that focuses not only on disarming people who are acutely at risk to themselves or others but offering other help—such as mental health care—to such persons. It would be the first extreme risk protection order law in the nation to provide a free mental health examination and referral for free mental health care treatment for people who are served with temporary extreme risk protection orders. The policy extends the personnel who can request an extreme risk protection order petition be filed to include several categories of non-law-enforcement reporters including health professionals, mental health professionals, and educational staff. The policy includes protections for non-law-enforcement reporters so that they are not in violation of HIPAA laws if they request a petition be filed. A final extreme risk protection order is in effect for one full year, with a provision for its extension if it is shown that a subject remains a threat to themselves or others. Finally, the process for issuing extreme risk protection orders is accelerated with the court having only 24 hours to decide whether to issue a temporary extreme risk protection order after a petition is received and a requirement that all firearms in the possession of the subject be surrendered within 24 hours of receipt of the order.

Consent Tally

This proposal received the consent of 22 of 23 panelists.

Dealer Regulation and Gun Trafficking

Background

The ATF found that, between 2017 and 2023, more than half of traced crime guns originated from federally licensed firearms dealers. There is evidence, however, that just 5% of gun stores are responsible for 90% of traced crime guns, meaning that a small minority of negligent or potentially criminal gun dealers are complicit in the vast majority of the damage inflicted by these crime guns. While the ATF is responsible for inspecting federally licensed dealers, their resources and reach in states are often limited. The addition of state-level efforts aimed at regulating firearms dealers and preventing gun trafficking has been found to be effective in reducing crime guns and combatting gun trafficking; such state-level efforts are the focus of this policy.

About the Policy

This policy adds substantial new gun violence prevention protections at the state level through a completely novel approach: setting up a gun dealer task force made up of state law enforcement and criminal investigation personnel who constantly monitor gun dealers for sale of guns used in crime and are authorized to investigate the dealers selling the highest volume of crime guns and potentially recommending sanctions. Rather than place burdensome regulations on all gun dealers—the majority of whom are not responsible for the problem—this policy focuses on working with the small minority of dealers from whom the majority of traced crime guns originate. Furthermore, rather than relying on ATF to enforce the law, the state takes it upon itself to ensure safe gun sales practices. Finally, the policy explicitly bans gun trafficking and straw purchasing and potentially holds both the seller and the purchaser liable in such transactions.

Protection of Gun Rights

This policy enforces best practices to prevent trafficking, theft and straw purchases for all gun dealers, while taking care to differentiate between responsible dealers, dealers who have committed a crime, and those who have committed no crime but may have failed to follow best practices, and takes a restorative and education-based approach with the latter category. Such cases also follow a “three strikes” approach, with increasing fines for the first two offenses, and a criminal negligence complaint for the third offense. It is important to note, however, that such leniency is reserved for dealers whom the state task force has determined did not *willfully and knowingly* sell to a trafficker, straw purchaser, or other prohibited person, and *not* for the dealers who have been determined to knowingly engage in such practices.

This policy also aims to protect gun dealers, manufacturers, and distributors from lawsuits that attempt to hold them responsible for negligent actions of third-party individuals or entities over which they have no control. It does this by codifying much of the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA) into state law. It ensures that only lawsuits that are based on violation of state or federal laws, negligent entrustment, or negligence are able to proceed. Furthermore, in lawsuits based on a claim of negligence, it provides protection to gun dealers and manufacturers by placing the burden of proof on the plaintiff to demonstrate that negligence on the part of the defendant was directly related to the damages for which relief is being sought.

Protection of Public Health

The policy establishes a Responsible Firearm Dealer Practice Task Force made up of stakeholders from law enforcement and the firearms community, tasked with developing sales and security protocols, guidelines, and materials based on best practices aimed at deterring straw purchasers, theft and trafficking, which all dealers will be required to follow. Furthermore, there shall also be a Firearm Sales Practices Investigation Team made up of law enforcement tasked with investigating the top dealers for crime guns within the state, either working along the cooperating dealers to improve their practices or referring them to the prosecuting authorities when appropriate. These resources will provide significant support in curbing trafficking caused by bad dealer practices in states where this policy is implemented, as it will greatly supplement work done by the ATF through significantly increased oversight, education, and enforcement of laws and regulations. Finally, this policy will require by law that all gun thefts to be reported by the owner within 48 hours.

Consent Tally

This proposal received the consent of 22 of 23 panelists.

Child Firearm Access Prevention and Responsible Gun Storage

Background

Secure firearm storage practices are associated with a decrease in suicides, unintentional injuries, and gun thefts. However, safe storage mandates are difficult to enforce and impractical for gun owners who own firearms for self-defense purposes.

About the Policy

This policy aims to enculturate secure firearm storage and staging practices within the gun community through enforcement of existing criminal negligence laws, tax incentives on the development and purchase of storage and staging devices, and a broader public health campaign that engages various experts, including many stakeholders in the gun community. Unlike much of the legislation seeking to remedy the issue of irresponsible firearm storage, the policy does not include a uniform safe storage mandate for gun owners.

Protection of Gun Rights

This policy addresses the three primary concerns that gun owners have about uniform storage mandates: (1) they are a one-size-fits-all approach that is not relevant in some situations; (2) that they rely largely on biometric devices which are not always reliable; and (3) that they focus only on storage, not staging, and therefore may negate the very purpose that some people own guns in the first place: self-defense in the home. Instead, the policy relies upon existing criminal negligence laws to create a strong incentive for gun owners to use safe storage and staging practices; the definitions are narrow so as to only target those who kept their firearms in a manner where they reasonably should have foreseen that a prohibited person or a minor would gain access.

The policy also protects gun owners whose firearms were stolen during an unlawful entry into their premises from liability if the theft was reported promptly upon discovery to law enforcement. Furthermore, the policy involves various stakeholders in the gun community in a coordinated campaign effort to incentivize responsible storage and staging practices and also provides financial incentives for the purchase of safe storage and staging devices.

Protection of Public Health

This policy adds substantial new gun violence prevention protections at the state level by using criminal negligence laws, rather than uniform mandates for storage, which many gun

owners oppose and do not comply with. The efficacy of relying on liability for negligence rather than uniform mandates is supported by a strong evidence base. This policy also includes novel approaches to enculturating safe storage and staging practices within the firearm community through education, public health campaigns, and financial incentives. Furthermore, this policy would require the distribution of storage and staging devices (such as locks), as well as instructional resources, at the point of purchase for all firearm sales and transfers. These devices are constantly made accessible free of charge by law enforcement, meaning that such a provision will have minimal to no financial burden on firearm dealers.

Consent Tally

This proposal received the consent of 21 of the 23 panelists.

Firearm Suicide Prevention

Background

Suicide by firearms is the number one cause of gun deaths in the United States, making up almost two-thirds of total gun deaths. Of total suicides, almost half are committed using firearms. Firearm suicides are an epidemic, and the most effective policies aim to reduce firearm suicides primarily through enculturation of mental health destigmatization and collaborative practices for suicide prevention within the gun community. Such enculturation requires the collaboration of public health experts and health care practitioners, with stakeholders in the gun community, such as FFLs, firearms trainers, gun clubs and ranges, and gun rights organizations.

About the Policy

The policy is based on the principle that by facilitating voluntary gun transfers for people in crisis, encouraging further collaboration between health care providers and the gun community, and educating the public about resources available to those in crisis, we could significantly reduce firearm suicides.

Protection of Gun Rights

This policy would legalize and facilitate voluntary firearm transfers, allowing a gun owner who feels they are at risk of self-harm, or who temporarily has a minor in the home whom they feel would be made less safe around a firearm, to temporarily transfer their firearms to a nonprohibited trusted individual, or to a club or organization that is legally allowed to receive guns for safekeeping. Waiting periods, transfer fees, and transport restrictions would be suspended in the case of such a transfer.

The policy calls for the state to build a publicly available, interactive map of federal Firearms Licensed Dealers, gun clubs, and other organizations legally allowed to receive guns who have indicated a willingness to store them for safekeeping in the event of a temporary voluntary transfer. Such entities and organizations will be eligible for a tax deduction for firearm storage costs incurred.

Protection of Public Health

This policy adds substantial new gun violence prevention protections at the state level through a novel focus on preventing firearm suicide that extends beyond simply the use of extreme risk protection orders or sales restrictions. The policy implements firearm suicide prevention education and awareness programs through multiple stakeholders and calls for the distribution of informational materials and resources at the point of sale. It also

contains a completely novel approach to firearm suicide prevention- allowing for the voluntary transfer of guns out of the hands of people who are at risk of self-harm- suspending certain bureaucratic barriers while still maintaining key safeguards. For example, there is a key provision prohibiting the party storing the firearms for the duration of a temporary emergency transfer from utilizing said firearms during that period, so as to prevent those who seek to utilize this policy to conduct permanent transfers while evading the background checks process, from doing so.

Consent Tally

This proposal received the unanimous consent of all 23 panelists.

Firearm Injury Prevention Education

Background

As of 2015, 1/3 of US households with children had guns. Seeing as the firearm ownership rate has only grown since then, the percentage of children living with guns at home is likely higher today. Reasons for gun ownership in such households are varied, but the reality remains the same; a large swath of American children are living with guns in the home, and that is unlikely to change. However, seeing as firearm injuries are the leading cause of death for children and teens in the United States, with a large swath of such injuries resulting from the unintentional discharge by youth, it stands to reason that there is a gap in firearm injury and prevention education for children.

About the Policy

Our policy aims to include firearm injury and prevention as one of the public health problems that public schools teach as part of their health curriculum, just as they would sex education, and the harms associated with drug and tobacco use. As of mid-2025, only three states (Tennessee, Arkansas, and Utah) have mandated firearm safety as part of the public and charter school curriculum. However, our policy differs in key manners. For starters, our policy calls for the curriculum to be created as part of a state task force that includes various experts and stakeholders, such as child psychologists, educators, parents, violence prevention, and firearm use experts, among others. The task force will decide on the target age groups for the curriculum, what will be included, and will create materials for the curriculum. However, our policy also calls for significant discretion given to individual school districts in the specifics of how the curriculum will be implemented, and how it can be molded to fit the needs of the specific community they are serving. This is due to our recognition that there is no space for an overly prescriptive one-size-fits-all approach to teaching this issue to youth within a state, as the relevance of certain materials, as well as the socio-emotional needs of youth differ drastically among different school districts.

Protection of Gun Rights

Gun owners have long been calling for better education of responsible practices as opposed to more regulation. This proposal would go a long way in enculturating firearm injury prevention practices among the next generation, helping protect youth vulnerable to firearm harms without laws such as a safe storage mandate, seen by many gun owners as overly restrictive and ultimately unenforceable. Having a firearm injury and prevention curriculum be mandated within school districts, as opposed to solely offering them as electives or through existing community partners, will ensure that this education reaches

youth who it otherwise would not; those with guns in the home but whose parents do not bother to appropriately secure their firearms or to teach their kids safe practices, those who don't live with guns, but often visit the homes of friends who do, and many more. By ensuring that these youth are aware of the risks and dangers of firearms, strategies to prevent injuries, and the proper steps to take if they encounter unsecured firearms, hopefully unintentional firearm injuries and deaths can be significantly reduced.

Protection of Public Health

The policy calls for the curriculum to be fully evidence-based, as well as developmentally appropriate, as is determined by the experts on the task force. The efficacy of the curriculum is to be evaluated annually by the state. Furthermore, no part of the policy calls for live firing, gun handling, or marksmanship by youth, and the policy would specifically prohibit advocacy for or against firearm ownership or any specific legislation as part of the curriculum.

Consent Tally

This proposal received the consent of 21 of the 23 panelists.

Community Violence Intervention

Background

Community gun violence, defined by Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions as “a form of interpersonal gun violence (assaults) that takes place between individuals who are not related or in an intimate relationship,” makes up the majority of gun homicides in the United States, disproportionately affecting Black and Brown men in minority neighborhoods. Community violence intervention (CVI) programs, which aim to disrupt the cycle of violence through personalized intervention and addressing the root causes of community violence (poverty, lack of economic opportunities and social services, and a history of underinvestment and exclusionary policies) have been proven to have a positive effect on diminishing community gun violence in neighborhoods where it is implemented.

About the Policy

Despite the prevalence of community gun violence, rarely has the firearm policy conversation focused on community gun violence. Our policy aims to empower and institutionalize at the state level these CVI programs, as well as Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs (HVIP).

Protection of Gun Rights

This policy also focuses on school safety and would increase state-provided technical support and funding for enhanced school safety and security, and behavioral threat assessments, all aimed at keeping schools safe.

Protection of Public Health

This policy designates violence as a public safety and health crisis, which must be addressed through a data-based public health approach. It directs the state to form a commission responsible for identifying target communities with high levels of interpersonal violence, and work alongside existing community violence intervention advocates within those communities to help address the issue. This policy also directs the implementation of HVIPs in hospitals receiving high levels of penetrating trauma injuries, and directs that services provided by HVIPs be covered by public and private insurance.

Consent Tally

This proposal received the consent of 20 of the 23 panelists.

Who We Are

Panelists

Arnitta Holliman, MS, LPC, CPC, is a violence prevention and mental health professional currently working as the Deputy of People and Culture at Cities United.

Robert ‘BJ’ Campbell, PE, MS, is a long-time gun owner and writer for Recoil Magazine and Open-Source Defense, as well as a licensed practicing civil engineer.

Cedric Dark, MD, MPH is a board-certified emergency physician, associate professor at the Henry JN Taub Department of Emergency Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, a gun-owner, and author of *Under the Gun: An ER Doctor’s Cure for America’s Gun Epidemic*.

Christopher Carita, MPH is a former veteran detective with 19 years of law enforcement experience who specializes in investigating threats of gun violence and ERPO implementation, and the current law enforcement advisor for 97Percent.

David Thomas is a business owner, a federally licensed firearms dealer, and NRA-certified firearms trainer.

David Yamane, PhD is a sociology professor at Wake Forest University, a nationally recognized scholarly authority on guns in America, and author of *Gun Curious: A Liberal Professor’s Surprising Journey Inside America’s Gun Culture*.

Eric Fleegler, MD, MPH is a pediatric emergency physician and researcher at Massachusetts General Hospital, a firearm injury prevention researcher, and co-editor of *Pediatric Firearm Injuries and Fatalities: The Clinician’s Guide to Policies and Approaches to Firearm Harm Prevention*.

Kelilah Armstrong, MS is the senior program manager of Brady’s End Family Fire Program. She has extensive experience in non-profit, public education, and DEI consulting.

Keturah Herron, MA, the first openly out LGBTQ+ person elected to the Kentucky General Assembly, is a Kentucky State Senator and one of the leaders of the Legislators for Safer Communities coalition.

Lara Cullinane-Smith, JD is the National Spokesperson for the Liberal Gun Club, where she supports efforts toward root-cause violence mitigation while protecting Second Amendment Rights. She is also a litigator focused on commercial disputes.

Madelyn Cobb is a Federal Affairs Manager at GIFFORDS, where she advances federal gun violence prevention priorities and works to ensure policymaking is grounded in the experiences of impacted communities. In her previous role at March for Our Lives, she partnered with grassroots organizations, youth, and community leaders to develop and advance community-driven gun safety reforms.

Mark Beckwith, DD is the Bishop Liaison for Bishops United Against Gun Violence, author of *Seeing the Unseen: Beyond Prejudices, Paradigms and Party Lines*, and a leadership team member in Braver Angels. He is the former Bishop of Newark, New Jersey.

Nick Wilson, MPP is the senior director for Gun Violence Prevention at American Progress. He has formerly served as the executive director of States United to Prevent Gun Violence, the Maine Gun Safety Coalition, and has worked at the Baltimore City Mayor’s Office.

Jeremy Stein, JD is a seasoned litigator, a nationally recognized gun violence prevention expert and the Executive Director of States United to Prevent Gun Violence.

Jonathan Gold is a longtime handgun instructor, gun-safety policy advocate at the national and state level, and the founding member of the Michigan Giffords Gun Owners for Safety chapter.

Jonathan Lowy, JD is the President of Global Action on Gun Violence, and an experienced litigator representing victims and survivors of gun violence. He has also served as the former Chief Counsel and VP of Legal at Brady.

Joshua Beckmann, MPH, MSW is a deer hunter and advocate for laws promoting public safety, and an engineering consultant

Karen Michelle Errichetti, DrPH, MPH is an Assistant Professor at Tufts' Department of Public Health and Community Medicine, active participant of the Republican Party in Massachusetts, and an avid public supporter of Second Amendment Rights

Paul Roessling, MBS, MPH is a firearms instructor with 10 years of training in the tactical firearms field, and a mental health technician and EMT.

Richard Aborn, JD is the president of the Citizens Crime Commission of NYC, where he leads efforts to improve public safety through legislation. He has previously served as the President of Handgun Control, Inc (now Brady) where he was a key strategist behind the Brady Bill, and as the President of the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence.

Rob Pincus is the Executive Director of Personal Defense Network, Vice President of the Second Amendment Organization, and founder of ICE Training Company and Avidity Arms.

Ryan Weiss, MA is an Active-Duty Air Force Officer, gun-rights activist, and a self-proclaimed "gun nerd" who has built a private gun range in his home in Oklahoma.

Steven Klitzman, JD, MA is the founder of the DC Temple Sinai Gun Violence Prevention Group and co-founder of the DC Area Interfaith Gun Violence Prevention Network. He has previously worked as an attorney and a law professor in several universities.

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