

DEMANDING COMMONSENSE GUN REFORM

Gun violence is a national tragedy and a preventable public health crisis affecting communities across the United States, Wisconsin, and here in Dane County. Survivors of gun violence can experience long-term physical and mental health effects. Witnesses, friends, families, and other members of the community often suffer long-term mental health impacts and disruptions to their lives. In Dane County, one out of every two adults reports being affected by gun violence, either directly or through a family member.

In 2022, 48,204 people died by firearms in the United States—an average of one gun death every 11 minutes. Every day in the U.S., 125 people are killed with guns and another 200 or more are wounded. In an average year in Wisconsin, 741 people die and 1,686 are wounded by guns. In our state, 64% of gun deaths are suicides and 33% are homicides.

Dane County has identified several high-impact priority policies for commonsense gun safety that are supported by a majority of Wisconsinites:

Implement Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) laws. ERPOs allow family members or law enforcement to petition a judge to temporarily disarm individuals who have made significant and credible threats of violence to themselves or others. As of August 2024, 21 states and the District of Columbia have enacted Extreme Risk Protection Order laws, which, when thoughtfully implemented, may prevent mass shootings, gun homicides, and suicides.

Implement mandatory universal background checks. Properly enforced background checks keep guns out of the hands of people who might be a danger to themselves or others. A majority of gun owners and Wisconsinites across our state agree that the process should be the same regardless of what type of firearm is being purchased, where, and from whom it is being purchased. A 2019 Boston University School of Public Health study published in the Journal of General Medicine found that states with laws requiring universal background checks for all gun sales had homicide rates 15% lower than states without such laws. Universal background checks lower rates of gun violence in our communities and save lives.

Implement more comprehensive gun storage laws and incentives for safe storage. While Wisconsin does have a Child Access Prevention (CAP) law, which holds individuals criminally liable if a child under age 14 gains access to a loaded firearm and causes harm or brings it into a public space, the state does not have a comprehensive Safe Storage Law, a self-assigned firearm exclusion (SAFE) program, or any statewide mandates for how firearms should be stored to prevent unauthorized or unsafe access. Safe gun storage can be financially incentivized by creating sales and use tax exemptions for sales of gun safes. Having more guns stored safely and securely would reduce accidental deaths, suicides, unintentional discharges, and gun thefts in Dane County.

Tools to stop the tragedy of gun violence exist, but we have to be able to implement them.

Wisconsin limits the authority of local governments to regulate firearms under Wisconsin Statute section 66.0409(2). An overwhelming majority of Wisconsin residents supports the enactment of commonsense, evidence-based gun safety reforms—such as mandatory universal background checks, “red flag laws,” and comprehensive safe storage—to save lives and prevent further tragedy. If state policymakers cannot find the courage and

conscience to enact these reforms, then they have a moral obligation to step aside and let local governments lead to protect and ensure the health, safety, and welfare of their local communities.

In Wisconsin, firearms are the second leading cause of teen deaths in Wisconsin. In Wisconsin an average of 69 children and teens die by guns every year; 33% of these deaths are suicides and 61% are homicides.

According to an analysis by Everytown for Gun Safety, gun violence on K-12 school grounds rose by 31 percent in the 2023-2024 school year in the U.S., the second-highest number of incidents since Everytown began tracking gun violence at schools more than a decade ago. In a 2019 report, the U.S. Secret Service found that 76% of school shooters acquired their firearm(s) from the home of a parent or close relative. This same report found that in 100% of targeted school gun violence incidents, there were warning signs that caused others to be concerned. Even in the absence of death or injury, exposure to gun violence has an impact on the psychological and mental well-being of young people and affects their school performance, relationships, and health, among other factors.

Dane County has experienced numerous gun-related incidents over recent years. Victims, family members, and communities are deeply impacted by the trauma of gun-related deaths. We must stop this endless cycle of trauma and preventable loss of life.

Women who experience domestic abuse are five times more likely to be killed by their abuser if the abuser has access to a firearm. In Wisconsin, firearms are the most common means of domestic violence homicides. Firearms are used to commit more than three in five of all intimate partner homicides in the United States, and women are the victims in more than three in four intimate partner homicides with a gun.

In Wisconsin each year, an average of 477 people die by gun suicides and 36 are wounded by gun suicide attempts. From 2014 to 2023, the rate of gun suicide in Wisconsin increased 38% and gun homicide increased 93% from 2014 to 2023, compared to a 21% increase and 57% increase nationwide, respectively. In Dane County, on average, 4 out of 5 (80%) people who die from guns die by suicide.

U.S. military veterans are three times more likely to die by gun suicide than non-veterans. From 2002-2021, nearly 87,000 U.S. veterans died by gun suicide in the U.S. This is 16 times the number of service members killed in hostile action during that same time period.

The State of Wisconsin has not enacted or repealed major gun safety policies since 2019, despite mounting incidents of gun violence and significant public pressure to enact commonsense protective laws. Since 2019, Republicans in the Wisconsin Legislature have blocked efforts to improve gun safety, such as universal background checks and extreme risk protection order laws.

In states where elected officials have taken action to pass gun safety laws, fewer people die by gun violence. In their 2025 ranking, Everytown for Gun Safety characterizes Wisconsin as "Missing Key Laws" compared to other states that have enacted mandatory universal background checks for all firearm purchases and extreme risk protective orders (ERPOs). Wisconsin ranks below neighboring Minnesota, which has 8.9 gun deaths compared to

Wisconsin's 12.7 gun deaths per 100,000 residents. The state also ranks below Florida, which has passed a statewide ERPO law.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Dane County Board of Supervisors asks the Wisconsin Legislature to take immediate action in the current legislative session by setting aside partisan differences and working together to enact the following commonsense, evidence-based gun safety reforms, among others, to reduce and prevent gun violence, injury, and deaths on behalf of the children, youth, families, U.S. Military veterans, and all people who call Wisconsin home:

- Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) Law (aka, "Red Flag Law")
- Mandatory Universal Background Checks on all firearm purchases, regardless of whether a seller is public or private, licensed or unlicensed
- A package of enhanced safe gun storage measures, including self-assigned firearm exclusion (SAFE) programs

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Dane County Board of Supervisors advocates for the repeal of Wisconsin Statute section 66.0409(2), which currently prohibits local governments from taking lifesaving action on behalf of their residents when the state refuses to take action.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Dane County Board of Supervisors supports the commonsense measures to prevent gun violence included in Governor Evers' upcoming 2025-2027 Executive Budget.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Dane County Board of Supervisors will convey a copy of this resolution to Governor Tony Evers and all members of the Wisconsin Legislature.