



March 4, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy,

On behalf of Prevention Institute, I write in strong support of H.R. 8 / S. 529 the Bipartisan Background Checks Act, and H.R.1446 and its companion Senate bill, the Enhanced Background Checks Act. Prevention Institute is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting health, safety, and wellbeing through thriving, equitable communities. We have championed a public health approach to preventing multiple forms of violence—including gun violence—since our founding in 1997. Prevention Institute believes that gun violence and its associated traumas are a public health crisis, and that Congress must enact meaningful legislation to help reduce gun violence in our communities.

In 2019, [39,707](#) people died from gun violence. We know that these deaths are a predictable outcome of our country's underinvestment in public health prevention approaches that work. Through a public health approach that focuses on drawing from evidence and addressing the factors that increase or decrease the risk of gun violence, particularly in communities that are disproportionately impacted, we can save lives. Tragically, the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic fallout may further exacerbate the public health crisis of gun violence. Experts have suggested that the pandemic may drive increases in [suicides, domestic violence](#), and community violence in the coming years. Several loopholes in federal law – and the background check system in particular – are not sufficient to prevent individuals who are ineligible to own a firearm from purchasing one. The Bipartisan Background Checks Act would enact universal background checks, closing these dangerous loopholes by ensuring that a background check happens on every firearms sale.

Prevention Institute works with communities throughout the country that are reducing gun violence through upstream prevention approaches that address risk factors associated with gun violence and bolster resilience in individuals, families, and communities. A public health approach addresses the roots of gun violence—including structural racism, and other forms of structural violence—to change community conditions and help change the odds of whether or not communities will be safe. We know that certain drivers and conditions, like concentrated disadvantage and the school-to-prison pipeline increase the likelihood of daily gun violence. And certain other conditions, like economic security, well-resourced schools, and safe parks, have the positive impact of decreasing the likelihood of gun violence. From this analysis, we know that to substantially reduce gun violence, we need to build equitable systems and institutions, and invest in strategies like truth, healing, reconciliation, and reparations; racial and gender justice training; and dismantling systems of mass criminalization and incarceration to name a few. Prevention Institute's [recommendations to prevent gun violence](#) through a public health approach begin with reducing the imminent risk of lethality through sensible gun laws and a culture of safety, broaden to address the underlying

contributors to gun violence, and then address the prevention infrastructure necessary to ensure effectiveness.

Since 1993, the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) has conducted firearm background checks on gun purchasers. Federally licensed dealers must run a check through NICS to determine whether a potential buyer is prohibited from purchasing firearms. If information in NICS shows that a person is indeed prohibited, the dealer must deny the sale. However, no background check is required for sales at gun shows, through online marketplaces, or between private individuals. Individuals who would otherwise be prohibited from purchasing or possessing a gun can easily buy guns through such unregulated sales. And the frequency of these unregulated sales is concerning: recent studies indicate that approximately [22 percent of firearms are purchased without a background check](#), up to 80% of firearms used in crimes are obtained without a background check.

H.R. 8 / S. 529 the Bipartisan Background Checks Act / Background Check Expansion Act would require a background check on every sale, ensuring that people prohibited from purchasing firearms cannot exploit loopholes and purchase guns through an unregulated sale at a gun show, online, or from an unlicensed seller. In addition, individuals would no longer be able to cross state lines solely to purchase a firearm in a state with less stringent background checks.

Additionally, H.R. 1446 and its companion Senate bill the Enhanced Background Checks Act / Background Check Completion Act would provide the FBI more time to complete background checks and ensure that people prohibited from possessing firearms are not able to obtain them by default because of an incomplete background check. This deadly loophole in existing law was exploited by a white supremacist who killed nine people at the Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

Too often, our communities bear witness to the terrible tragedies that occur when people use guns to harm themselves or others. Gun violence is a complex public health issue and one program or policy alone is not sufficient. However, by adopting comprehensive public health strategies and solutions, we can achieve safety in our homes, schools, and communities. Enacting universal background checks is an important next step.

Our support for universal background checks comes from our understanding that gun violence is preventable, not inevitable. Changing the underlying conditions that contribute to multiple forms of violence—in homes, schools, and neighborhoods—prevents violence from occurring in the first place. We strongly urge you to pass H.R. 8 / S. 529 the Bipartisan Background Checks Act / Background Check Expansion Act and H.R.1446 and its companion Senate bill the Enhanced Background Checks Act/ Background Check Completion Act, as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



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