

SAFER STATES AGENDA

White House Office of Gun
Violence Prevention
DECEMBER 2023



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Contents

Overview	3
The Safer States Agenda	4
1. Establish a State Office of Gun Violence Prevention	4
2. Invest in Evidence-informed Solutions to Prevent and Respond to Gun Violence	4
A. Fund Community Violence Interventions (CVI):	4
B. Fund Law Enforcement Initiatives to Hold Shooters and Gun Traffickers Accountable:	4
C. Improve Lethal Means Safety for People at Risk of Suicide	5
D. Enact and Implement Extreme Risk Protection Orders	5
3. Strengthen Support for Survivors and Victims of Gun Violence	5
A. Ensure that Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Funding Helps Gun Violence Survivors:	5
B. Establish and Grow Gun Violence Trauma Recovery Centers:	6
C. Establish a Gun Violence Crisis Response Team	6
4. Reinforce Responsible Gun Ownership	6
A. Require Safe Storage of Firearms and Make Storage Options Accessible	6
B. Require Reporting of Lost and Stolen Firearms	6
C. Remove Firearms from Dangerous Domestic Abusers.....	6
5. Strengthen Gun Background Checks	7
A. Enact Universal Background Checks Legislation.....	7
B. Remove Barriers to Completing Enhanced Background Checks.....	7
A. Ban Assault Weapons, High-Capacity Magazines, and Ghost Guns	7
B. Require Gun Dealer Licensing, Recordkeeping, and Security.....	8
C. Enact a Gun Industry Accountability Law.....	8

Overview

The Safer States Initiative is a White House effort to provide states with more tools and federal support to take life-saving action and reduce gun violence. A key element of the Safer States Initiative is the Safer States Agenda, described below. The agenda is not comprehensive, but highlights actions that states can take to achieve meaningful progress in the next year. In the months ahead, the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention will work with states to make sure they have the resources needed to advance this life-saving agenda.

The Safer States Agenda

1. Establish a State Office of Gun Violence Prevention

Effective gun violence prevention, intervention, and response requires strategic coordination to implement new policies and programs. A state Office of Gun Violence Prevention—equipped with clear mandate and experienced personnel—can coordinate resources and accelerate implementation. State offices should have sufficient authority to: (a) coordinate across state agencies and with local and federal governments; (b) build gun violence data collection and analysis capacity; (c) develop and implement comprehensive strategies for addressing various types of gun violence; and (d) develop and implement a state plan to prevent targeted violence and effectively respond to incidents of mass shootings and surges in other forms of gun violence. *In September 2023, President Biden established the first-ever White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention, overseen by Vice President Harris.*

2. Invest in Evidence-informed Solutions to Prevent and Respond to Gun Violence

- A. Fund Community Violence Interventions (CVI): Studies show that violence intervention programs can reduce violence by as much as 60 percent. These programs—which are often led by community-based organizations—are effective because they use evidence to provide community-informed, comprehensive social, health, and economic support for individuals at greatest risk of gunshot victimization. State investments in these programs are critical to reducing gunshot injury and death in the areas most impacted by gun violence. *The President encourages states to use remaining American Rescue Plan State and Local funds to support CVI strategies. The Biden-Harris Administration created the first-ever federal funding stream solely dedicated to CVI, the [Community Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative](#).*
- B. Fund Law Enforcement Initiatives to Hold Shooters and Gun Traffickers Accountable: States should fund community policing consistent with the standards laid out in President Biden’s [Executive Order on Advancing Effective, Accountable Policing and Criminal Justice Practices](#). States should also support efforts to improve clearance rates for homicides and shootings, such as dedicated investigatory units and training on working with victims and witnesses to engender trust and cooperation between law enforcement and these populations. The Biden-Harris Administration can assist states to build and strengthen Crime Gun Intelligence Centers that improve crime gun ballistic information collection, crime gun tracing, and other intelligence gathering to help generate leads, connect guns with multiple crime scenes, and identify gun trafficking channels. *The Biden-Harris Administration just announced [\\$334 million](#) in grant funding for law enforcement agencies and expanded the [Local Law Enforcement Crime Gun Intelligence Center Integration Initiative](#) to help state and local governments use data and technology to reduce gun crime and illegal gun use. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) [directly supports](#) Crime Gun Intelligence Centers with staff and tools.*

- C. Improve Lethal Means Safety for People at Risk of Suicide: Studies have shown that reducing access to lethal means, including firearms and medications—particularly in times of crisis—saves lives. Many evidence-based lethal means intervention strategies are available, including cable locks, gun safes, off-site storage sites, and Extreme Risk Protection Orders. State should invest in the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline crisis call centers and mobile crisis response teams. They should also invest in providing training and resources for crisis responders and natural helpers on safety planning, which includes discussions about making the environment safe through lethal means interventions for people in crisis. *The Biden-Harris Administration’s comprehensive [military and veteran suicide prevention strategy](#) establishes an unprecedented federal focus on improving lethal means safety as a tool to save lives. The Biden-Harris Administration has run the largest-ever [public awareness campaign](#) focused on lethal means safety and provided [guidance](#) to federally licensed gun dealers on how to provide temporary storage on their premises so they can serve as off-site storage for people in crisis.*
- D. Enact and Implement Extreme Risk Protection Orders: Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs)—sometimes referred to as “red flag” orders—allow certain individuals to petition courts to temporarily remove access to firearms from someone in a crisis. ERPOs are a critically important part of a comprehensive effort centered on targeted violence intervention, school safety, and suicide prevention efforts. States should not only enact ERPOs but ensure effective ERPO implementation, which requires training courts and law enforcement regarding their roles in the ERPO process, increasing public awareness about ERPOs, and ensuring there is storage available when guns are temporarily seized under an ERPO. *In June 2021, the Department of Justice issued [model state ERPO legislation](#). Since then, two additional states have enacted ERPO laws. The [Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program](#)—funded by the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) —provides states with funding to implement crisis interventions. The Biden-Harris Administration encourages states to use this funding to implement ERPOs and to allocate additional state funds to these efforts. In 2024, Johns Hopkins will launch the BSCA-funded [National ERPO Resource Center](#) to help law enforcement and other leaders implement this life-saving tool.*

3. Strengthen Support for Survivors and Victims of Gun Violence

- A. Ensure that Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Funding Helps Gun Violence Survivors: The Biden-Harris Administration provided [\\$1.5 billion](#) in grants to expand access to victim services by investing in programs that provide trauma-informed and culturally responsive services to victims. Funding will support thousands of local victim assistance programs across the country and victim compensation programs in every state and three U.S. territories, while helping these programs build their capacity to reach those disproportionately affected by crime and victimization. However, gun violence survivors often face barriers to access the funding. States are encouraged to designate a portion of their available VOCA funds to evidence-based or promising practices to serve victims of gun violence—e.g., hospital-based violence intervention programs and trauma recovery centers—and expand eligibility for gun violence victims, including by waiving the requirement that crime victims need to cooperate with law enforcement to access these funds. *President Biden signed the VOCA Fix, [which](#) sustained funding and clarifies that a state may [waive](#) the*

requirement that victim compensation programs promote victim cooperation with law enforcement, allows states to waive matching requirements for Crime Victims Fund grant funds under certain circumstances, and provides the Attorney General with the authority to provide no-cost extensions to all VOCA award recipients. The Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime has also [clarified that VOCA funding](#) may be used to support CVI efforts.

- B. [Establish and Grow Gun Violence Trauma Recovery Centers](#): States should invest in Trauma Recovery Centers, which use proven approaches to help crime survivors meet their needs with clinical case management and coordinate care across systems. Centers should focus on communities most harmed by gun violence and address the diverse needs of survivors who have been hard to reach through other channels. *The Biden-Harris Administration has [released](#) a strategy to address our national mental health crisis, expanded community mental health clinics and crisis services across the nation, and clarified that tens of millions of dollars in federal funding can be used to expand access to trauma-informed care.*
- C. [Establish a Gun Violence Crisis Response Team](#): Mass shootings and surges in community violence can overwhelm a community. An effective response will coordinate across federal, state, and local agencies to support victims, survivors, and other community members as they navigate their recovery. States should develop response strategies and have resources ready to deploy for communities. *President Biden tasked the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention with coordinating federal support for communities impacted by gun violence.*

4. Reinforce Responsible Gun Ownership

- A. [Require Safe Storage of Firearms and Make Storage Options Accessible](#): States should enact and implement strong laws requiring firearms owners to safely store their firearms in their homes and vehicles. The laws should impose a clear standard to penalize those who do not safely store their weapons and whose weapons end up being used for violence. States should also invest in efforts that raise awareness of the range of safe storage options available to keep guns out of the hands of children and unauthorized individuals, and fund individuals' access to effective storage options through tax incentives. *The Justice Department issued model state legislation for secure storage of firearms. In addition, a number of federal grant programs are available to support efforts to raise awareness of safe storage and increase access to storage devices, including the [STOP School Violence Program](#) and the [Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program](#).*
- B. [Require Reporting of Lost and Stolen Firearms](#): Stolen guns are often diverted to people prohibited from having guns and end up being used in crimes. States should enact legislation requiring that lost or stolen guns be promptly reported to law enforcement, enabling quick investigation and identification of gun trafficking rings whenever lost guns are used to commit a crime. *The Justice Department issued model state legislation requiring reporting of lost and stolen firearms.*
- C. [Remove Firearms from Dangerous Domestic Abusers](#): Federal law bars domestic abusers who are subject to a restraining order or convicted of a domestic violence misdemeanor from

purchasing or possessing firearms. States should go further by requiring these domestic abusers to surrender their weapons to courts or law enforcement. This proactive step ensures that firearms are promptly removed from dangerous situations. *The Biden-Harris Administration [expanded](#) the grant program to assist states in implementing these programs and supports a [national resource center](#) on domestic violence and firearms.*

5. Strengthen Gun Background Checks

- A. [Enact Universal Background Checks Legislation](#): The federal gun background check system is one of the best tools we have to keep guns out of dangerous hands. However, federal law only requires a background check prior to a sale at a federally licensed gun dealer (or Federal Firearms Licensee), creating what is sometimes referred to as the private sales loophole. States across the country have enacted universal background check legislation to close this loophole and extend the background check requirement to private sales. More states should follow suit. *President Biden has called for Congress to pass universal background checks legislation. He also signed an [Executive Order](#) directing the Attorney General to move the United States as close as possible to universal background checks without additional legislation.*
- B. [Remove Barriers to Completing Enhanced Background Checks](#): The BSCA establishes enhanced background checks for individuals under age 21 who are trying to purchase a firearm. During an enhanced background check, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) contacts the state record holder of relevant juvenile mental health records, the state record holder of relevant juvenile criminal records, and local law enforcement to determine whether the potential purchaser is prohibited from possessing a firearm. These enhanced background checks have already increased denials by over 20% for firearms transactions to individuals under age 21. Some states need to amend their privacy laws to ensure that they are able to respond to the background check system’s requests for information. For example, [Texas](#) and [Vermont](#) have already enacted these reforms. States can implement such reforms and still maintain the confidentiality of juvenile records for purposes other than responding to the enhanced background check, including for the vast majority of young people not attempting to purchase a firearm or whose juvenile records do not disqualify them from doing so. States should also partner with state and local law enforcement to ensure that local law enforcement respond to enhanced background check inquiries. *The Department of Justice has completed implementation of the enhanced background checks across jurisdictions. It has also worked with more than 500 state and local law enforcement leaders to increase state and local law enforcement agencies’ response rates to enhanced background check inquiries.*

6. Hold the Gun Industry Accountable

- A. [Ban Assault Weapons, High-Capacity Magazines, and Ghost Guns](#): In addition to banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, states should ban the possession of unserialized firearms, often referred to as “ghost guns.” Law enforcement reported that ghost guns are increasingly found at crime scenes across the country. *President Biden has called for Congress to ban assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, and the possession of unserialized firearms. In the meantime, his Administration has done as much as possible*

under existing authority to prevent the manufacture of ghost guns by regulating the core parts used to build these guns. The Justice Department [has made clear](#) that if a company is making a partially finished frame or receiver that can be readily converted to be an operational firearm, then it needs to be sold like any other firearm—with a serial number and background check.

- B. [Require Gun Dealer Licensing, Recordkeeping, and Security](#): States should pass laws to license gun dealers and enact modern best practices regarding electronic recordkeeping, information sharing, video-recording, and physical security measures. These standards allow law enforcement to investigate and prevent gun trafficking and identify rogue gun dealers. States should then initiate a targeted inspection and compliance program to identify rogue gun dealers. Congress has provided ATF with the resources to inspect around 10% of gun dealers each year, leaving room for states to play an important, complementary role in the inspection process. *The Biden-Harris Administration [formalized](#) the use of data-driven prioritization of gun dealer inspection resources, and established a zero tolerance policy for rogue gun dealers that willfully violate the law. ATF has also designated a specific point of contact in every field division, so state and local leaders can report concerns about particular dealers' compliance with the law.*

- C. [Enact a Gun Industry Accountability Law](#): The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA) is a federal law that provides gun manufacturers and gun dealers with more protection from legal liability than tobacco companies and alcohol companies. This law denies many victims of gun violence their day in court, and prevents the public from holding bad actors accountable for their potentially dangerous design, marketing and sales practices. However, states are enacting state firearm-specific liability laws that create new predicates and thus allow some litigation to proceed under PLCAA. Illinois, Delaware, and California are three examples of states that have enacted such liability laws. Other states should join in this effort. *President Biden has repeatedly called for Congress to repeal PLCAA.*