



June 9, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I am writing to urge the Senate to immediately act and pass much-needed policy reforms to address the senseless firearms-related injuries and deaths that continue to occur across this nation. The most recent tragic mass shootings that occurred in Buffalo, NY, Uvalde, TX, and Tulsa, OK aren't wake-up calls; these shootings are the ongoing national nightmare of violence caused by the illegal use of firearms. These horrifically violent incidents mean that Congress must act now—at the national level—to help stop this epidemic of firearms-related violence. You have it within your power to exact some positive change by passing common-sense legislation. Accordingly, we are encouraged by reports in the media that the Senate is working to craft bipartisan legislation that could begin to address firearms-related violence.

ACP is the largest medical specialty organization and the second largest physician membership society in the United States. ACP members include 161,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists, and medical students. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge, clinical expertise, and compassion to the preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness. Internal medicine specialists treat many of the patients at greatest risk from COVID-19, including the elderly and patients with pre-existing conditions like diabetes, heart disease and asthma.

ACP is greatly concerned not only about the alarming number of mass shootings in the United States but also the daily toll of firearm violence in our neighborhoods, homes, workplaces, and public and private venues across the country. According to the most recent [data](#) published by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), “in 2020, there were 45,222 firearm-related deaths in the United States – that’s about 124 people dying from a firearm-related injury each day. More than half of firearm-related deaths were suicides and more than 4 out of every 10 were firearm homicides.”

For more than two decades, ACP has called for common-sense policies that would help reduce the number of injuries and deaths stemming from firearms. In 2019, ACP joined with 41 other leading organizations in a joint [call-to-action](#) that called for evidence-based solutions to mitigate firearms violence. We are pleased that many of the proposals included in our most [recent policy paper](#) on firearms violence prevention are also policies reportedly being considered in possible bipartisan Senate

legislation. We call on the Senate to act **now** to pass the following policies under discussion to reduce the danger of injury and death from gun violence.

Expanding Background Checks

ACP strongly supports legislation that would enhance background checks. Examples of gun sales not requiring background checks through NICS include those at gun shows, through the internet, and between private individuals or classified ads. Accordingly, ACP [supports](#) the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2021 (H.R. 8) and the Background Check Expansion Act (S. 529). ACP strongly supports strengthening the accuracy and reporting of the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) as well as expanding Brady background checks to cover all firearm sales, including unlicensed firearms sellers currently not required to use background checks. With some exceptions, the legislation would expand background checks to cover all private and commercial firearm transfers and sales. In addition, because gun sellers would now be required to perform background checks for all sales and transfers, gun purchasers would no longer be able to cross state lines to buy firearms in a state with less rigorous background check laws. ACP applauds the House for passage of this legislation and urges Senate leadership to expedite its consideration in the Senate.

Increasing Utilization of Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO)

ACP supports the usage of extreme risk protection orders (ERPO) to allow families and law enforcement to obtain a ruling from an impartial judge within 72 hours to temporarily remove guns from individuals at imminent risk of using them to harm themselves or others, with due process. ERPOs empower families, household members, or law enforcement officers to ask a judge to temporarily remove a person's access to firearms who is found to be at imminent risk of using them to harm themselves or others. ACP supports the Extreme Risk Protection Order Act of 2021 (S. 1819/H.R. 3480), which would assist states in developing court processes to allow family members to petition a court for a firearm violence prevention order to temporarily halt dangerous individuals from purchasing weapons from federally licensed dealers. Under this legislation, states could also develop a court process that would allow family members to petition a court for an extreme risk protection order that would grant law enforcement the authority to temporarily take weapons away from individuals who present a threat to themselves or others.

Making Mental Health Services More Available

ACP recommends that every effort be made to reduce the risk of suicide and violence, through prevention and treatment. Diagnosis, access to care, treatment, and appropriate follow-up are essential. Ensuring access to mental health services is imperative. Mental health services should be readily available to persons in need throughout their lives or through the duration of their conditions. Ensuring an adequate availability of psychiatric beds and outpatient treatment for at-risk persons seeking immediate treatment for a condition that may pose a risk of violence to themselves or others should be a priority. ACP has submitted several [statements](#) to Congress calling for policies that integrate primary care with behavioral health, improve mental health parity with increased federal oversight and enforcement, conduct research to implement effective public health interventions, and ensure adequate physician workforce so patients have adequate access to mental health services. ACP supports the Collaborate in an Orderly and Cohesive Manner (CoCM) Act (H.R. 5218) as well as the Improving Access to Behavioral Health Integration Act (S. 4306) that would assist physicians in integrating primary care and behavioral health services.

Raising the Age to Obtain Certain Weapons

Reports in the media indicate that raising the age to 21 to buy certain firearms is at least being discussed in the Senate. As an interim step toward a complete assault-weapons ban, ACP does support raising the age from 18 to 21 for an individual to purchase a semi-automatic rifle, such as an AR-15, that has or can accept a magazine of five rounds or more. We remain concerned that the gunman in the recent mass shooting in Uvalde was able to purchase two assault rifles and large quantities of ammunition when he turned 18. ACP was pleased to [support](#) legislation known as the Raise the Age Act (H.R. 3015 in the 117th Congress) that would raise the age for the purchase of semiautomatic rifles from 18 to 21.

Conclusion

ACP considers enactment of the policies above as just an incremental first step in an ongoing effort to reduce firearms-related violence. ACP has expressed its [strong support](#) for H.R. 7910, the Protecting Our Kids Act, a more comprehensive set of measures to prevent gun violence in this country which passed the House of Representatives on June 8, 2022. We support provisions in the Protecting Our Kids Act to reduce gun violence by raising the age to purchase certain firearms, increasing penalties for gun trafficking, supporting safer storage of firearms, banning large capacity magazines, and strengthening measures to prevent the use of ghost guns. We sincerely hope that the Senate will also consider enacting these policies to reduce firearms-related deaths and injuries.

ACP is committed to advancing reasonable, evidence-based policy reforms to curb firearms-related injuries and deaths, as outlined above. Physicians are on the front lines of caring for patients affected by intentional or unintentional firearm-related injury. We care for those who experience a lifetime of physical and mental disability related to firearms-related injury and provide support for families affected by firearms-related injury and death. As a necessary initial step in addressing the public health crisis created by firearms violence, we urge the Senate to pass the policies above without delay and we stand ready to work with you to achieve this. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "R. Mire", enclosed within a large, hand-drawn oval.

Ryan D. Mire, MD, FACP
President