



August 8, 2019

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

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

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I am writing to urge the Senate to put partisanship aside and act on 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 El Paso, TX and Dayton, OH should be a wake-up call to lawmakers that something needs to be done to stop this epidemic of firearms-related violence. You have it within your power to exact some positive change by passing legislation that is currently pending in your chamber.

ACP is the largest medical specialty organization and the second-largest physician group in the United States. ACP members include 159,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists, and medical students. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge and clinical expertise to the diagnosis, treatment, and compassionate care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness.

On August 7th, ACP and six of the nation's leading physician and public health organizations released a call to action, published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* entitled, "[Firearm-Related Injury and Death in the United States: A Call to Action from the Nation's Leading Physician and Public Health Professional Organizations](#)." In this paper, ACP, together with the American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Surgeons, American Medical Association, American Psychiatric Association, and the American Public Health Association, outline common sense policies to reduce firearms-related injuries and deaths. These include the need for universal background checks on all firearms purchases, protections for victims of firearms-related domestic violence, extreme risk protection orders for those deemed a threat to themselves or others, and federal funding for the study of firearms safety and injury prevention, to name a few.

For more than 20 years, ACP has advocated for the need to address firearms-related injuries and deaths in the United States. On October 30, 2018, *the Annals of Internal Medicine* published ACP's updated position paper on reducing firearms injuries and deaths. Entitled, "[Reducing Firearm Injuries and Deaths in the United States: A Position Paper from the American College of Physicians](#)," the policy recommendations in the paper build on current ACP policies and are based on analyses of common-sense approaches that the evidence suggests will be effective in reducing deaths and injuries from firearm-related violence. The paper was an update and expansion of ACP's 2014 position paper. The

new paper reaffirms many of ACP's 2014 recommendations, such as banning sales of assault weapons and requiring universal background checks, and proposes new policies on issues including extreme risk protection orders, domestic violence, child access prevention, and others that are found to be effective in reducing gun-related injuries and deaths. A summary of the paper can be found [here](#).

Specifically, ACP urges the Senate to take up and pass the following legislation/initiatives:

The Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019 (H.R. 8), which would strengthen the accuracy and reporting of the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) as well as expand 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 also expand background checks to cover all private and commercial firearm transfers and sales, including those at gun shows, over the internet, or in classified ads. ACP applauds the House for passage of this legislation and urges Senate leadership to expedite its consideration in the Senate.

Funding for Gun Violence Prevention Research in the Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations bills

ACP [submitted](#) a statement to the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies that urged the committee to provide dedicated and increased federal funding for research on firearms violence and lift current restrictions on this research in FY2020. The House of Representatives passed the Fiscal Year 2020 Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations bill that included \$50 million total for this research, with \$25 million allocated to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and \$25 million to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study firearms safety and gun violence prevention. Federally-funded research is needed on firearms-related violence and on intervention and prevention strategies to reduce injuries caused by firearms and ACP urges the Senate to retain this funding level in its companion legislation.

The Violence Against Women (VAWA) Reauthorization Act of 2019 (H.R. 1585), which includes provisions to prohibit persons convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence, including violence against persons outside their own household, from possessing firearms as well as prohibits persons who are subject to a temporary or permanent court order of protection from possessing firearms. ACP applauds the House for passage of this legislation and urges Senate leadership to expedite its consideration in the Senate.

Loopholes in the background check system that allow domestic violence offenders to buy and own firearms should be closed. Domestic violence offenders include dating partners, cohabitants, stalkers, those who victimize a family member other than a partner or child, and those with temporary restraining orders. Federal law prohibits abusers who have been convicted of domestic violence misdemeanors and abusers subject to certain domestic violence protective orders from purchasing or possessing firearms. However, federal laws intended to prevent access to firearms by domestic abusers have significant limitations, in that they do not apply to many abusers who victimize non-spouse partners or family members other than a child, and they do not apply to persons with temporary, versus permanent, domestic violence restraining orders. ACP calls on these domestic violence loopholes to be closed by prohibiting sales and possession of firearms by persons convicted of domestic violence offenses on persons outside of their own household, as well as for any person with a temporary restraining order during the time when the restraining order is in effect.

The Extreme Risk Protection Order Act of 2019 (S. 506/H.R. 1236), would allow states to use Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) funding to develop 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 bill, 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.

ACP supports the enactment 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.

The Assault Weapons Ban of 2019 (S. 66/H.R. 1296), which would prohibit the sale of semi-automatic assault weapons and large capacity ammunition feeding devices. ACP supports banning semiautomatic firearms that are designed to increase their rapid killing capacity (often called "assault weapons"). Only as an interim step toward a complete ban, ACP supports increasing the minimum age to purchase semi-automatic firearms to 21, consistent with the federal requirement for handguns. ACP supports enacting legislation to ban the manufacture, sale, transfer, and subsequent ownership for civilian use of assault weapons and their large capacity magazines and supports retaining the current ban on automatic weapons for civilian use.

Conclusion

ACP is committed to advancing reasonable, evidence-based policy reforms to curb firearms-related injuries and deaths, as outlined above. As a necessary first step in addressing the public health crisis created by firearms violence, we urge the Senate to pass these measures without delay and we stand ready to work with you to achieve this.

Sincerely,



Robert M. McLean, MD, FACP
President

CC: Members, United States Senate
Members, United States House of Representatives