

REPORTING LOST AND STOLEN FIREARMS

REDUCE ILLEGAL FIREARM TRAFFICKING WHICH CAUSES CRIME

Overview

A Lost and Stolen Reporting law would require individuals to report firearms to law enforcement within 24 hours of discovering the loss or theft of their firearm. Police would then enter the information into an FBI firearms database. Individuals who fail to report lost or stolen firearms would face a civil penalty.

Gun owners are not required by federal law to report their lost and stolen firearms to law enforcement. These lost or stolen guns are often diverted into the illegal gun market and are used in crime. A Lost and Stolen Reporting law would help prevent diversion by increasing private gun seller accountability and deterring straw purchasers. For example, if someone sells a gun to a prohibited person and that gun ends up at a crime scene, the seller cannot hide their involvement in the illegal gun sale by using the excuse “my gun must have been stolen.”

Lost and Stolen Reporting Will Reduce the Flow of Illegal Guns into Urban Communities of Color

- Each year an estimated 380,000 firearms are stolen in the US; over 100,000 of these thefts are not reported to law enforcement.¹ These thefts fuel violent crime in urban communities of color.
- Urban communities of color in Virginia are disproportionately impacted by firearm theft, trafficking, and violence. Blacks in Virginia are 8.2 times more likely to be murdered by firearm than their White counterparts.²
- From 2010 to 2015, firearm theft rates increased by 53% in Richmond and 82% in Hampton.³
- In 2017, nearly 40% of all illegal firearms that were traced and recovered in Virginia were recovered in Richmond and the Hampton Roads region.⁴
- Lost and Stolen Reporting laws help reduce the disproportionate impact firearm violence has within urban communities of color by limiting the accessibility of illegal firearms.

Lost and Stolen Reporting Will Help Law Enforcement Solve Crimes

- According to law enforcement officials, if they are not quickly notified about a lost or stolen firearm, they cannot immediately respond. This hinders criminal investigations and their understanding of gun trafficking networks.⁵
- Lost and Stolen Reporting laws help law enforcement recover stolen firearms faster. As soon as a gun is reported stolen, law enforcement can begin investigating people who have a history of trying to illegally obtain guns.

Lost and Stolen Reporting Will Address Virginia’s Interstate Gun Trafficking Problem

- In 2016, more than 9,000 guns purchased in Virginia were later recovered in crime scenes or suspected of use in crimes; 41% of these guns were recovered in states other than Virginia.⁶
- In 2016, 37% of Virginia’s guns had a short “time to crime,” meaning these guns were recovered in a crime within two years of the original purchase date, a strong indicator of gun trafficking.⁷
- According to researchers from Johns Hopkins University, Lost and Stolen Reporting laws act as a measure of accountability for private gun sellers and are found to significantly reduce interstate gun trafficking.⁷

Bottom Line

A Lost and Stolen Reporting law will help reduce the flow of illegal firearms into Virginia’s urban communities of color. It will help police recover lost and stolen guns quicker, thereby reducing interstate gun trafficking and violent crime.

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- ¹ Hemenway, D., Azrael, D., & Miller, M. (2017). Whose guns are stolen? The epidemiology of Gun theft victims. *Injury epidemiology*, 4(1), 11.
- ² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Underlying Cause of Death 1999-2017 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released December 2018. Accessed at <http://wonder.cdc.gov/ucd-icd10.html>
- ³ Freskos, B. (2017) Missing Pieces: gun theft from legal owners is on the rise, quietly fueling violent crime across America. The Trace. <https://www.thetrace.org/features/stolen-guns-violent-crime-america/>
- ⁴ Office of Strategic Intelligence and Information. Virginia Data Source: Firearms Tracing System. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. 2017. <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/docs/undefined/vawebsite17183879pdf/download>
- ⁵ Siegelbaum, M. (2017) Only 11 states require gun owners to report stolen weapons to police. The Trace.
- ⁶ Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Office of Strategic Intelligence and Information, "Virginia Firearms Trace Statistics - 2016," October 11, 2017, available at <https://www.atf.gov/docs/undefined/2016tracestatvirginiapdf/download>
- ⁷ Webster DW & Vernick JS. (2013). *Reducing gun violence in America: informing policy with evidence and analysis*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.