

VIRGINIA NEEDS UNIVERSAL BACKGROUND CHECKS NOW

Virginia does not require that every individual seeking to purchase a firearm undergo a background check. Private sellers (i.e. at gun shows or online) are not required to conduct background checks, creating a loophole for prohibited persons – including felons, fugitives, and domestic abusers – to easily access firearms. A universal background check law closes these dangerous loopholes and creates accountability among private gun sellers.

Passing a universal background check law in Virginia would help keep firearms out of the hands of dangerous individuals. In 2017, 345 Virginians died by firearm homicide; and Virginia's firearm homicide rate increased 45% in the last five years (2013-2017).¹ To help reduce these firearm deaths, Virginia needs to pass universal background checks now.

Virginia needs universal background checks to keep guns away from dangerous individuals

- Millions of people acquire guns without background checks every year, and they do so disproportionately in states that do not regulate private gun sales, like Virginia.
- A 2015 survey found nearly 1 in 4 gun owners (22%) who recently acquired firearms did so without a background check.²
- Criminals prohibited from owning firearms can use this loophole to perpetrate violence. A study examining where violent criminals acquired their guns found that 96% of offenders who were legally prohibited attained their gun from a supplier not required to conduct a background check.³
- Universal background checks close this dangerous loophole. It requires that every individual seeking to purchase a firearm undergoes the same background check process to ensure they are not prohibited by federal law from possessing a firearm.

Universal background checks are an effective gun violence prevention strategy

- Research suggests that universal background checks prevent the diversion of firearms into criminal networks. States without universal background checks have 30 percent higher levels of exporting guns across state lines that were later recovered from criminals.⁴
- Universal background checks reduce illegal gun trafficking. Virginia is considered a top exporter of trafficked guns. In 2016, more than 9,000 guns originally purchased in Virginia were later recovered in crime scenes or suspected of use in crimes in Virginia and other states.⁵
- Universal background checks are an essential foundation of any effective system of gun violence prevention laws. When Connecticut used universal background checks as the foundation for its permit to purchase law, the firearm homicide rate decreased by 40% and the firearm suicide rate decreased by 15%.^{6,7}

Universal background checks are widely supported

- A 2017 Quinnipiac University poll found 94% of Virginia voters support requiring background checks for all gun buyers. This includes 99% of Democrats, 90% of Republicans, and 94% of Independent voters.⁸

BOTTOM LINE: Virginia should enact universal background checks on all gun sales to close the loopholes that currently allow prohibited individuals to purchase firearms. Passing universal background check legislation will help save lives.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Underlying Cause of Death 1999-2017 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released December, 2017. Accessed at <http://wonder.cdc.gov/ucd-icd10.html>

² Miller M, Hepburn L, Azrael D. (2017). Firearm Acquisition Without Background Checks: Results of a National Survey. *Ann Intern Med*,166:233–239. doi: 10.7326/M16-1590

³ Vittes KA, Vernick JS, Webster DW. (2013). Legal Status and Source of Offenders’ Firearms in States with the Least Stringent Criteria for Gun Ownership. *Injury Prevention*, 19:26-31. <https://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/19/1/26>

⁴ Webster D.W., Vernick J.S., McGinty E.E., Alcorn T. (2013). Preventing the diversion of guns to criminals through effective firearm sales laws. *in Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis* (Vol. 9781421411118, pp. 109-121). The Johns Hopkins University Press.

⁵ Virginia is a Top Exporter of Crime Guns. EFSGV Analysis of Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, “Firearms Trace Data - 2016,” Available at: <http://efsgv.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Virginia-is-a-Top-Exporter-of-Crime-Guns-2.pdf>.

⁶ Rudolph, K. E., Stuart, E. A., Vernick, J. S., & Webster, D. W. (2015). Association between Connecticut’s permit-to-purchase handgun law and homicides. *American journal of public health*, 105(8), e49-e54.

⁷ Crifasi, C. K., Meyers, J. S., Vernick, J. S., & Webster, D. W. (2015). Effects of changes in permit-to-purchase handgun laws in Connecticut and Missouri on suicide rates. *Preventive medicine*, 79, 43-49.

⁸ Quinnipiac University. (2017). “Do you support or oppose requiring background checks for all gun buyers?” Question 31, April 6-10, 2017. Retrieved from <https://poll.qu.edu/virginia/release-detail?ReleaseID=2451>