

Dear President Biden: Gun Violence is a National Crisis Too

During your inaugural address, you announced that you would be focusing your administration on “containing a raging virus,” “confronting growing inequality,” addressing “the sting of systemic racism” and tackling our “climate in crisis.”¹

Unfortunately, you’re inheriting another national crisis: rising gun violence across the country. And we, the survivors of gun violence, have come together to tell you that you cannot address the impacts of Covid-19 or eradicate systemic racism, without working to reduce gun violence in the early days of your administration.

You ran on the most ambitious and comprehensive gun reform agenda in history and are taking office in the midst of a surge in gun sales and a significant spike in gun deaths and injuries. In fact, homicides have increased by double digits in more than a dozen major cities in 2020.² Childhood deaths have risen by 40 percent in 2020 and teenage deaths are up by 37 percent.³ This past year, the United States experienced 612 mass shootings, a 47 percent increase from 2019. Numerous data points indicate that suicides are on the rise across the country as a growing number of Americans are taking their lives amidst the economic and social distress of Covid-19.⁴

Here are the steps your administration should take to reduce gun violence:

Integrate Gun Violence Prevention Into Every Agency’s Mission. Americans are calling out for you to elevate gun reform throughout the administration and instruct every federal agency, department, and program to address this crisis. Nowhere is this call louder than in the Black and Brown communities closest to the pain of everyday gun violence, many of which continue to be disproportionately impacted by Covid-19. On the campaign trail, you pledged to establish a \$900 million initiative to fund evidence-based violence interventions in cities across the country and we are urging you to live up to that promise by making robust investments in violence intervention programs that have successfully mitigated cyclical and retaliatory gun violence as part of your effort to tackle the impacts of Covid-19 and systemic racism and inequality in our country.

Crack Down on Social Media Companies that Enable Hate and Violence. As you noted in your inaugural address, our nation is experiencing “a rise in political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism” that “we must confront and we will defeat.” The link between racism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism and our nation’s loose gun laws became all the more apparent as thousands of mostly white American insurrectionists mobbed the U.S. Capitol Building on January 6, 2021, resulting in the deaths of at least five Americans. This terror attack on America took place as hate crimes rose to their highest number in a decade, and white nationalism and right-wing extremism surged over the summer.⁵ These troubling increases only underscore the reality that firearms are too easy to acquire in the United States and your administration must work to enhance oversight of the firearms industry, bolster enforcement efforts against firearm dealers who have a history of selling firearms that end up being used in crimes, and crack down on social media companies that have allowed extremists to organize, spread conspiracy theories, and cause violence in the real world for years.

Strengthen Our Nation’s Federal Gun Laws. Your administration will have to work with the U.S. Congress to pass much-needed legislation to 1) strengthen our nation’s background check system for firearm and ammunition purchases, 2) ban military-style assault weapons and high capacity magazines in the civilian marketplace, 3) crackdown on firearm trafficking, 4) require safe storage of firearms, 5) hold firearm manufacturers accountable for their dangerous and irresponsible products and business practices, 6) allow for temporary removal of weapons from individuals who may harm themselves or others, 7) and make criminal justice and police reform a priority.

Expand the Coalition. Build a New Playbook for Gun Violence Prevention. We urge you to reframe this conversation away from the partisan food fight it has become and define it as the preventable public health crisis it is. To do this, you must engage new voices that could help reach new audiences, build unexpected political coalitions, and strengthen the public case for gun reform. This includes doctors, nurses, religious, and business leaders, and gun owners and gun dealers who, over the last several years, have come to understand that they have a responsibility to keep their customers, patients, employees and fellow Americans safe from gun violence.

We, the undersigned, are eager to work alongside you in building safer American communities and are going to do all that we can to ensure that gun reform is a priority in your administration.

¹ <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/20/joe-biden-inauguration-speech-transcript-full-text-460813>

² <https://twitter.com/Crimealytics/status/1343950694672379905>

³ <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/past-tolls>

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/11/23/covid-pandemic-rise-suicides/>

⁵ <https://apnews.com/article/hate-crimes-rise-fbi-data-ebbcadca8458aba96575da905650120d>

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