

Report offers evidence-based recommendations aimed at reducing Illinois gun violence

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Illinois could reduce the number of people killed each year by gun violence by implementing ten policies supported by available research, according to a new report authored by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research. The center is based at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The recommended policies include strengthening the state's gun purchaser licensing system by requiring an in-person application to law enforcement, fingerprinting and safety training. New data in this report suggest that purchaser licensing is more effective in reducing firearm homicides when these systems require in-person applications with [law enforcement agencies](#).

The report also recommends expanding current firearm prohibitions for domestic abusers and individuals convicted of multiple alcohol-related offenses, and providing more funding for local initiatives proven to reduce [gun violence](#).

The report, Policies to Reduce Gun Violence in Illinois: Research, Policy Analysis, and Recommendations, was commissioned by the Joyce Foundation. It is available for download from the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research [here](#).

"Compared to many other states, Illinois has relatively strong firearm

laws overall, yet many opportunities exist for the state to strengthen their approach to reducing the diversion of guns for criminal use and gun violence," says the report's lead author, Cassandra Crifasi, Ph.D., MPH, deputy director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research. "Importantly, the policies and strategies outlined in this report are applicable to other states considering evidence-based approaches to reduce firearm homicide and suicide and don't infringe upon the rights of law-abiding gun owners."

Currently, Illinois is one of nine states that requires individuals to obtain a license or permit from law enforcement—called a Firearm Owner's Identification (FOID) in Illinois—to acquire a handgun. Previous research from the report authors found that handgun purchaser licensing is effective at reducing gun homicides, suicides and shootings of law enforcement officers.

Illinois is one of two states with permitting requirements that allows individuals to apply for their license online or by mail. Illinois also does not require applicants to undergo any training prior to application. The state also does not mandate, as some states do, that individuals seeking to buy a firearm from a private seller who is not a licensed gun dealer pass a background check; private sellers are only required to check if the prospective purchaser's FOID is valid. Illinois FOIDs are valid for 10 years, but if private sellers fail to verify that a prospective purchaser's FOID is valid, current law provides no criminal penalties.

The individual who shot and killed five people last Friday in Aurora, Illinois was reportedly prohibited from owning a firearm. According to media accounts, he was approved for a FOID card after passing a background check and was able to purchase a firearm despite having a felony conviction; Illinois' FOID application does not require fingerprinting. When he later applied for a concealed carry permit, which requires fingerprinting, state officials discovered the prohibiting

condition.

"Illinois arguably has the weakest of all handgun purchaser licensing laws," says report co-author Daniel Webster, ScD, MPH, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research. "Strengthening this existing law to require an in-person application with fingerprinting, requiring the police to conduct a background check while verifying the FOID card and requiring more frequent renewal of licensing would be a wise investment in public safety."

Illinois law does not require law enforcement to remove firearms when gun owners are identified as prohibited after a FOID card has been issued. The report recommends that if individuals are later identified as prohibited and fail to surrender their FOID and/or firearms upon notice of revocation, law enforcement should dispossess these prohibited individuals of their firearms.

In addition to strengthening the state's purchaser licensing law and identifying promising new legislation, the authors underscored the importance of robust enforcement of new state laws that regulate retail gun sellers and create a process for removing firearms from people planning to harm themselves or others through court-ordered extreme risk protection orders.

Other evidence-based recommendations include modifying existing domestic violence-related firearm prohibitions to last the length of the order or two years; extending firearm prohibition to individuals convicted of multiple alcohol-related offenses; providing [law enforcement](#) discretion to deny concealed carry licenses to those identified as legal but dangerous; banning the sale and possession of new assault weapons and requiring current assault weapon owners to register them; banning the possession of large-capacity magazines (more than 10 rounds); and providing funding to support community programs such as

focused deterrence, outreach and conflict mediation involving high-risk individuals.

"Addressing gun violence requires a comprehensive evidence-based approach encompassing enforcement of existing laws, strengthening of current laws identified as weak, adoption of new evidence-based laws and funding for violence prevention programs," says Crifasi. "By considering the policy recommendations put forth in this report, Illinois has an opportunity to decrease their rates of firearm homicide and suicide, and serve as a model for other states seeking to reduce the toll of gun violence in their communities."

Provided by Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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