

Recess Toolkit

Stand Up for Safer Gun Laws

August 2019

Introduction

Americans are demanding gun safety reform like never before. In November, we elected a gun safety majority to the House of Representatives in a midterm election with record voter turnout.

The gun safety majority in the House has made unprecedented progress in the first half of 2019, including passing universal background checks, appropriating funds for gun violence research, and closing loopholes in laws that allow stalkers to obtain guns.

But Mitch McConnell has left these lifesaving bills to die in the Senate by refusing to even bring them up for a vote. We must hold our politicians accountable for choosing partisanship over the will of the American people.

This August, it's up to you to demand more from your representatives in Congress. It's up to you to make it clear that if our representatives won't prioritize saving lives from gun violence, come 2020, we'll elect a Congress that will.

Included in this Toolkit:

1. **LEARN:** What you need to know about the gun laws being debated at the federal level.
2. **ASK:** Questions to ask your members when you attend a Town Hall
3. **CALL:** Scripts to help you deliver a message when you call your member's office
4. **WRITE:** Submit a op-ed in your local paper
5. **SHARE:** Social media content for you to share with your networks

1. Learn

What You Need to Know about Gun Safety Legislation

Thanks to a historic number of candidates running and winning on gun safety in the 2018 midterm elections, gun violence prevention has been a top priority in the House of Representatives this year. Unfortunately, Mitch McConnell and the Trump Administration continue to block any of the bipartisan bills that have passed the House from becoming law. **Here's what the House has already accomplished -- and their potential next steps:**

- **Background Checks for All Gun Sales:** Background checks are an effective way to keep guns away from those prohibited from having them, stopping over 3 million illegal sales since they were instituted in the 1990s. However, current law makes it far too easy for dangerous people to get a gun without having to pass a background check if they buy it online, at a gun show, or in a parking lot. Over 90% of Americans support closing this dangerous loophole. In February, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed H.R. 8, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act, which requires a background check on every gun sale or transfer. **The Senate has yet to consider this bill.**
- **Funding for Gun Violence Research:** Gun violence is a public health and safety crisis in America, killing close to 40,000 people every year. Every other phenomenon that kills so many Americans is researched by our leading public health institutions, the CDC and NIH, leading to life-saving policy and health interventions. Unfortunately, the gun lobby has bullied Congress into not funding gun violence research for the past two decades. The House took a critical step towards changing that in June, approving an appropriations bill that included \$50 million for the CDC and NIH to study gun violence. **The Senate has yet to consider this bill.**
- **Critical Protections for Victims of Domestic Violence:** Guns and domestic violence are a deadly mix. The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation makes it [five times more likely the victim will die](#), while domestic violence assaults involving a gun are [12 times more likely to end in death](#) than assaults with other weapons or physical harm. The bipartisan Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act - which prohibits abusive dating partners, convicted stalkers, and abusers subject to temporary restraining orders from accessing firearms - closes loopholes in our gun laws that leave women vulnerable. The House passed this lifesaving legislation in early April. **The Senate has yet to consider this bill.**
- **Supporting Extreme Risk Laws:** Extreme risk laws allow the courts, upon request from law enforcement, family members, or others, to temporarily remove firearms from a person who poses a danger to themselves or others. As of June 2019, 17 states and the District of Columbia have passed these laws, which provide a critical tool to families and law enforcement to temporarily disarm individuals in crisis to reduce the risk of suicide or violence

against others. The Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing on extreme risk laws in March, and legislation to incentivize more states to pass these laws has been introduced in both the House and the Senate. **Neither chamber has considered this legislation.**

What You Need to Know about Your Lawmaker's Record

We've created a database that compiles the latest information on **NRA grades, gun lobby contributions, and positions on key issues** like background checks, extreme risk laws, and the Violence Against Women Act.

[Click here](#) to look up information about your member's record.



SHARE THE TOWN HALL CHEAT SHEET ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Use this sample tweet to help you get started.

- `@YOUR REP or SEN'S HANDLE` has taken `[insert dollar amount]` donations from the gun lobby.

Who is your member working for: you or the gun lobby? Find out with this tool ↓
<http://giffords.me/cheatsheet>

2. Ask a Question

Questions to Ask Elected Officials at Town Halls

Question 1: Gun Violence in America

- Every day, 100 Americans die from gun violence. Americans know tragedy all too well—from mass shootings at Sandy Hook, Las Vegas, and Parkland, to the daily gun violence that disproportionately impacts communities of color. **What are you doing to keep our community safe from gun violence?**

Question 2: Background Checks (For Senators)

- A strong bipartisan majority of the House of Representatives recently passed background checks for all gun sales. More than 90% of Americans consistently support universal background checks. **What's your position on enacting universal background checks, and what actions are you taking now to ensure the bill is signed into law?**

Question 3: Gun Violence Research (For Senators)

- Nearly 40,000 Americans were killed by guns in 2017. That's a public health and safety crisis that threatens children and families nationwide. From car crashes to heart disease, the federal government funds research into every other phenomenon that kills so many Americans. But for more than two decades, there has been virtually no funding for gun violence research. **Will you commit to supporting funding for gun violence research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institute of Health (NIH)? What are you doing to ensure this funding is passed into law?**

Question 4: Disarming Domestic Abusers (For Senators)

- Earlier this year the House reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act. This bill included provisions to make sure domestic abusers, convicted stalkers, and people subject to temporary restraining orders cannot have or buy guns. **What is your position on this bill? What actions are you taking to are you doing to urge the Senate to take up the House-passed bill?**

Question 5: Enacting Extreme Risk Laws

- Since the Parkland shooting, several states have enacted an extreme risk law to allow the temporary removal of a firearm from a person in crisis and at risk of hurting themselves or others. 17 states and the District of Columbia now have these laws. **What can Congress do to support the implementation and effectiveness of these laws in the states?**

3. Make a Call

Scripts for calling your Senators

NOTE - You can reach your members of Congress by calling the U.S. Capitol switchboard at **(202) 224-3121**, which will connect you directly with your senators' office; or dial the member's office directly at numbers found [here for the Senate](#).

Script: Calling about Legislation to Strengthen Gun Laws in America

Hi, my name is [] and I'm a constituent of [Senator NAME], calling from [town/city]. Every day, 100 Americans die from gun violence. Earlier this year, a strong bipartisan majority of the House of Representatives passed background checks for all gun sales, a bill supported by more than 90% of Americans. The House also recently passed a bill that includes funding to research gun violence in America. **What is [Senator NAMES]'s position on these bills and what steps is he/she taking to get them signed into law?**

- **If opposes bills:** How can [Senator NAME] claim to care about protecting our families but refuse to support the very legislation that will make our communities safer? As our elected leader, it's [Senator NAME]'s responsibility to stand up for the safety of [his/her] constituents, not the gun lobby.
- **If noncommittal:** If [Sen NAME] is serious about keeping [his/her] constituents safe and bolstering law enforcement, I expect [him/her] to strongly support this live-saving legislation and vote for it. Can [Senator] commit to protecting our families and communities by voting in favor of these bills?
- **If supports bills:** Great! Thank you to [Senator NAME] for working to keep our communities safe from gun violence.

4. Write

Submit an OpEd in Your Local Paper

Make your voice heard in the community by submitting an OpEd local newspaper. Use the sample below as an idea to help you get started.

Sample OpEd:

In 2018, historic election victories propelled a new majority in the House of Representatives to power that made gun safety a priority. **ADD LINES ABOUT LOCAL REPS VICTORY/RESPONSE.** For the [first time in a generation](#), gun violence prevention legislation like universal background checks and funding for gun violence research passed Congress. But we've hit a roadblock: Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and President Donald Trump are refusing to take the next step. The consequences for **STATE** are stark.

INSERT STATE-SPECIFIC STATS ON GUN VIOLENCE FOUND [HERE](#). **STATE** isn't the only place that is hurting. Each year the gun violence epidemic took the lives of nearly [40,000 Americans](#).

It's never been more clear what we need to do. But nothing will happen if Majority Leader McConnell, President Trump, and **INSERT NAME OF YOUR SENATOR** don't hear us. We need to demand a response from them. Because each day they don't bring a universal background checks bill up for a vote, means 100 more people will die from gun violence.

We can't let the pressure let up because it works. **ADD A FEW LINES ABOUT LOCAL ACTIVISM MAKING A DIFFERENCE.** Because of Americans demanding action the House of Representatives approved of bills to require a background check on every gun sale or transfer, the closure of loopholes to keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers, and new funding for gun violence research.

We have to carry the message of gun safety toward the finish line. Here in **STATE**, we know gun violence is a serious threat to our communities. It's time to demand **SENATOR/REP** details **ADD A LINE OR TWO ABOUT WHAT THEY SHOULD SAY/DO.**

It is imperative that we push every Senator in Washington DC to understand **ADD A LINE OR TWO ABOUT WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR YOU.** There's simply no time to waste.

5. Tweet

Social Media Content to Share

NOTE - Remember to include a period at the beginning of your tweet if you start with a handle.

Sample Social Media Posts

- **.@YOUR REP or SEN'S HANDLE:** 100 Americans die every day because we let dangerous people get their hands on guns. It's time for action. What is your plan to #EndGunViolence and save lives?
- **.@YOUR REP or SEN'S HANDLE:** "Thoughts and prayers" won't stop the next shooting. What is your plan to strengthen our country's gun laws and save lives? #EnoughIsEnough
- **.@YOUR REP or SEN'S HANDLE:** Over 90% of Americans support background checks on every gun sale. Do you? #BackgroundChecksNow
- **.@YOUR SEN'S HANDLE:** Gun violence is one of the leading causes of death and injury in the US. It's past time for the government to invest in research to study this public safety threat.
- **.@YOUR REP or SEN'S HANDLE:** The NRA opposes the Violence Against Women Act because they want domestic abusers and stalkers to be able to keep their guns. You need to help pass #VAWA and protect domestic violence survivors from their abusers.
- **.@YOUR REP or SEN'S HANDLE:** When someone shows signs of hurting themselves or others, an extreme risk law can make a crucial difference. Extreme Risk Protection Orders empower law enforcement and family to intervene. Please push to enact this type of law nationwide.
- **.@YOUR REP SEN'S HANDLE:** The House of Representatives has already passed several gun safety bills, from universal background checks to funding for gun violence research. But Mitch McConnell refuses to even bring them up for debate. What are you doing to demand a vote on these bills?
- **.@YOUR REP or SEN'S HANDLE** has taken [insert dollar amount] donations from the gun lobby.

Who is your member working for: you or the gun lobby? Find out with this new tool from @giffordscourage ↓ <http://giffords.me/cheatsheet>

Gun Safety Groups to Follow

The groups below are committed to advancing commonsense change that makes communities safer from gun violence.

- **Giffords** [@GiffordsCourage](#)
- **States United to Prevent Gun Violence** [@SUPGVNetwork](#)
- **Brady** [@bradybuzz](#)
- **Everytown for Gun Safety** [@Everytown](#)
- **March for Our Lives** [@AMarch4OurLives](#)
- **Community Justice Reform Coalition** [@_cjactionfund](#)
- **Coalition to Stop Gun Violence** [@CSGV](#)
- **Center for American Progress** [@CAPAction](#)