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The Impact of Gun Violence in Michigan

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Introduction and summary

Michigan has taken important steps in passing laws that prevent guns from falling into the hands of individuals who pose a risk to themselves or others. According to the latest scorecard from the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, Michigan received a “C” grade for the strength of its gun laws in 2020.¹ The state requires individuals to have a permit before they can purchase a handgun from a private seller,² a form of law that a growing body of research suggests is effective at reducing gun homicides.³ The state also requires private gun owners to report missing or stolen firearms. These actions have worked: Compared with other states, Michigan ranked 31st in terms of gun deaths per every 100,000 people from 2015 to 2019.⁴ More recently, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) announced a \$75 million plan that includes targeting gun trafficking; supporting programs to increase access to social as well as mental health services; and expanding jobs, education, and employment opportunities in communities affected by violence.⁵ After the terrible shooting at Oxford High School in November 2020, Gov. Whitmer correctly called gun violence a public health crisis and pledged to do even more to address it.⁶

Despite important progress, however, many gun reform bills in Michigan have been met with opposition, particularly from Republicans in the state legislature.⁷ As a result, gun violence remains a key issue that affects communities across the Great Lakes State. Every day, more than three people are killed with a gun and more than nine people are nonfatally injured.⁸ In this regard, all state leaders should support additional steps to prevent gun violence. This report presents six aspects of gun violence in Michigan that are particularly alarming or above the national average and that support the need for actions and policies to further reduce and prevent gun violence.

6 aspects of gun violence in Michigan

Michigan has taken major steps in implementing gun safety actions. Yet gun homicide, particularly among Black youth; gun suicide; nonfatal gun injuries; intimate partner gun homicide; stolen guns; and armed extremism remain significant challenges facing the state.

1. Michigan has one of the highest rates of gun homicides of Black people

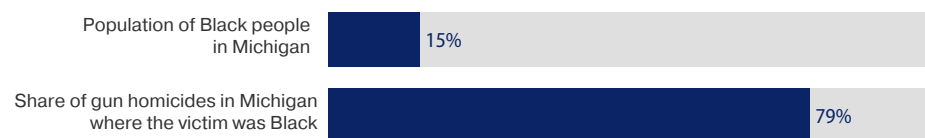
Compared with other states, Michigan ranks 21st when it comes to overall gun homicides—a rate slightly above the national average.⁹ However, gun homicides in Michigan disproportionately affect Black communities. From 2015 to 2019, the state presented the ninth-highest rate of gun homicides of Black people across the 50 U.S. states.¹⁰ With a rate of 24.83 gun homicides per every 100,000 people, Michigan’s rate of gun homicides against Black people was 30 percent higher than the national rate of homicides against Black people. Overall, while Black people represent 15 percent of the state population, they suffer 79 percent of gun homicides.¹¹

Gun homicides against Black people in Michigan tend to concentrate in urban counties and affect young people ages 15 to 29. In fact, from 2015 to 2019, the rate of gun homicides against young Black people in urban Michigan counties was 57 per every 100,000 people—33 times higher than gun homicides of young white people living in the same counties.¹²

In this regard, it is important to highlight that gun violence in urban communities is often the result of social and economic factors beyond easy access to firearms.¹³ In fact, violence in these urban regions often occurs in just a few neighborhoods that are at an economic disadvantage, are highly segregated, and have a long history of racial discrimination.¹⁴ Additionally, there are often tense and distrustful relationships between these communities and the police.

FIGURE 1

Gun homicides disproportionately affect Black people in Michigan 2015–2019



Source: Center for American Progress analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Injury Prevention & Control Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System: Fatal Injury and Violence Data," available at <https://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate.html> (last accessed January 2022).

As a result, perpetrators of violence against Black people in these communities are too often not brought to justice. According to a 2018 analysis from *The Washington Post*, almost 75 percent of homicides that go without an arrest in major American cities involve Black victims.¹⁵ This contributes to mistrust of the police and leads youth at risk of being both victims and perpetrators of future violence to choose other means of protection and justice.¹⁶ When addressing violence in urban Michigan communities, policymakers should consider these issues and implement actions to address them, further complementing gun-related policies. While the state has implemented major community-based violence interruption initiatives, it can further expand these programs to address many of these root causes of violence.

2. Gun suicides are on the rise, particularly among young people and veterans

Close to two-thirds of gun deaths in the United States are suicides.¹⁷ When compared with other developed nations, the United States has a rate of gun suicides that is 10 times higher than the average rate.¹⁸ The volume of firearms and the ease by which they are accessed play a major role in this. The United States is the country with the highest rate of gun ownership, and studies have shown that these weapons significantly increase levels of lethality in suicide attempts. A 2013 report found that 85 percent of suicide attempts with firearms were fatal.¹⁹ In fact, a 2007 study found that states with higher levels of household gun ownership had higher rates of both gun suicides and overall suicides.²⁰

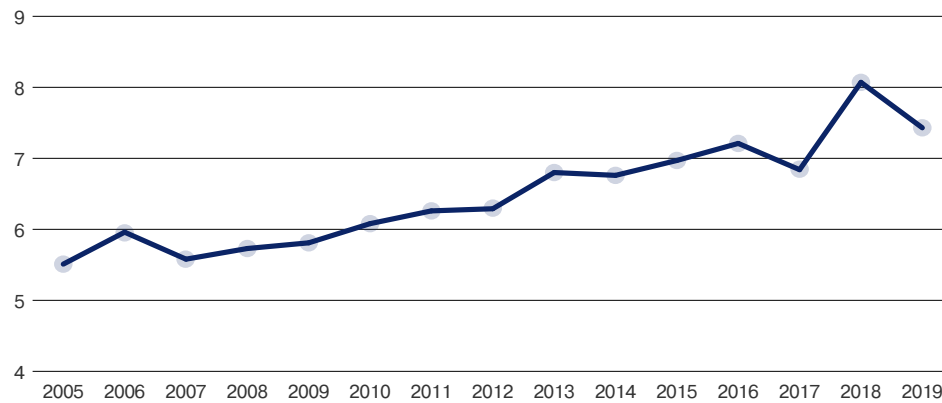
Because firearms are the most lethal mechanism in suicide attempts,²¹ the problem of gun suicides is present across all states—and Michigan is not the exception. During 2019, 742 people lost their lives to gun suicides in the state, close to two fatalities per day.²² Moreover, Michigan exhibits an alarming trend, with gun

suicides increasing over the past 15 years. While the rate of gun suicides from 2005 to 2009 was 5.72 per every 100,000 people, it was 7.30 per every 100,000 people from 2015 to 2019, a 28 percent increase.²³ This increase coincides with a surge in handgun ownership across the state.²⁴ Furthermore, rates of gun suicides have particularly grown among young people between ages 15 to 24 in Michigan. While the average rate of gun suicides among young people from 2005 to 2009 was 3.91 per every 100,000 people, it was 6.38 per every 100,000 people from 2015 to 2019, a 63 percent increase.

FIGURE 2

In Michigan, gun suicides are on the rise

Gun suicides per 100,000 people, 2005–2019



Source: Center for American Progress analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Injury Prevention & Control Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System: Fatal Injury and Violence Data," available at <https://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate.html> (last accessed January 2022).

Furthermore, during 2018, the suicide rate among veterans in Michigan was 1.8 times higher than the overall rate of suicide in the state.²⁵ Firearms contribute to this problem. During that same year, close to 53 percent of suicides among the population in Michigan involved the use of a firearm, and this percentage rose to 68 percent among veterans.²⁶ This can partially be explained by the higher levels of gun ownership among veterans, as well as their lack of timely access to physical and mental health services.²⁷ Studies show that nationally, close to 22 percent of the U.S. population owns a firearm;²⁸ this percentage more than doubles for U.S. veterans, rising to 50 percent.²⁹ When looking specifically at gun suicide rates during 2018, veterans in Michigan presented a rate that was 2.3 times higher than the state rate of gun suicides.³⁰ Unfortunately, the problem appears to be getting worse. Data show that from 2014 to 2018, the rate of gun suicides among veterans in Michigan increased 20 percent.³¹

Overall, gun suicide is a growing challenge in Michigan. While all factors associated with this trend must be addressed, state leaders should consider the role that easy access to firearms plays in increasing levels of lethality during suicide attempts.

3. Compared with other states, Michigan has higher rates of nonfatal gun injuries

Daily, more than 100 people are killed with a gun in the United States, and more than 200 are nonfatally injured.³² Like gun-related homicides, these injuries disproportionately affect young people and communities of color³³ and are the result of assaults, police shootings, suicide attempts, or unintentional actions.³⁴

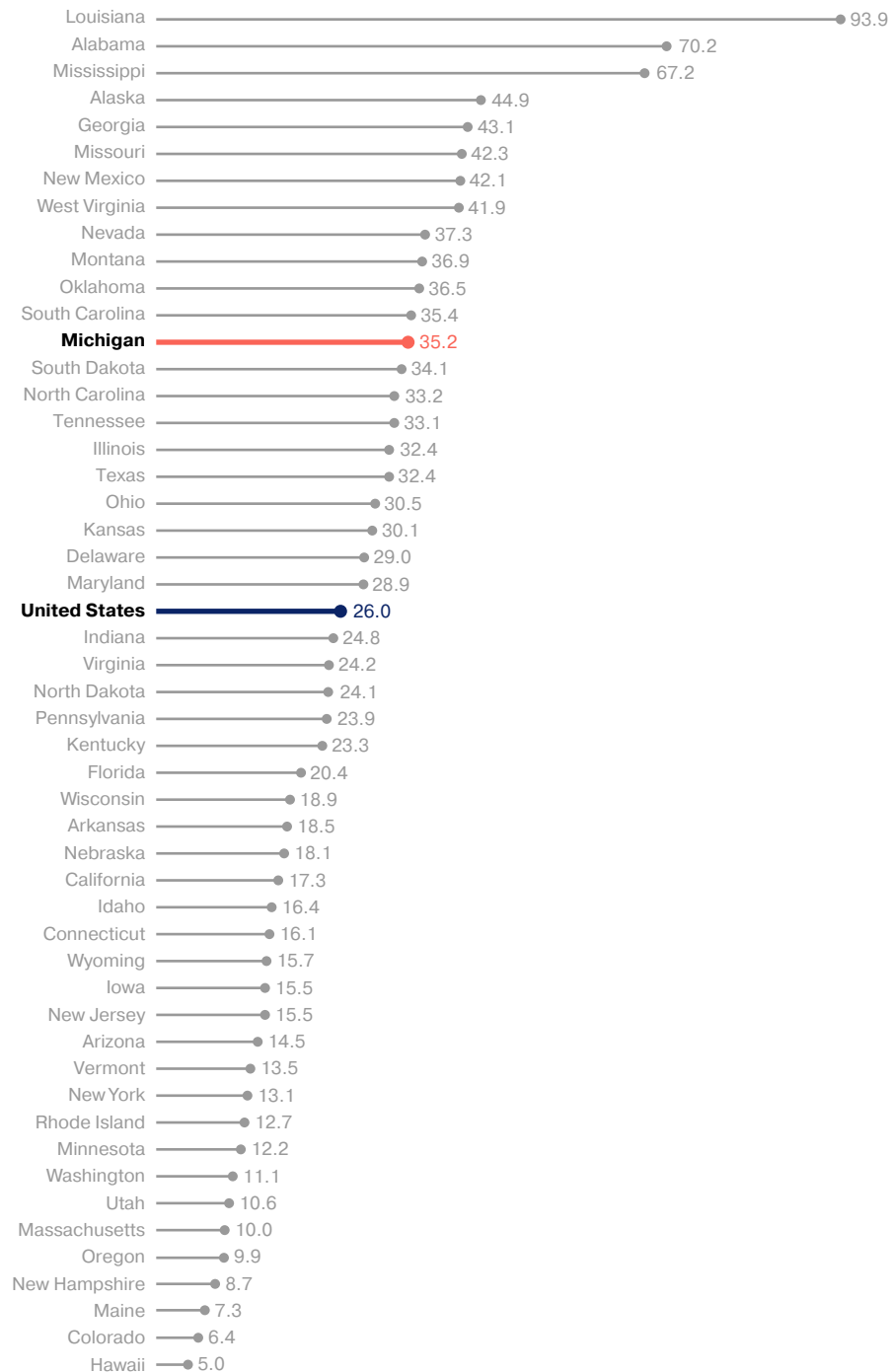
While access to data on nonfatal gunshot injuries is limited,³⁵ research by Everytown for Gun Safety suggests that rates of injuries in Michigan are particularly high compared with other states. Michigan had a rate of 35.2 nonfatal gunshot injuries per every 100,000 people in 2017. This was 35 percent higher than the national rate and placed Michigan as the state with the 13th-highest level of nonfatal gunshot injuries.³⁶ Among those cases involving nonfatal gunshot injuries in Michigan, 51 percent were linked to assaults against people, including shootings by police. Another 47 percent were attributed to unintentional or undetermined shootings, and 2 percent were suicide attempts.

Nonfatal gunshot injuries are a major public health challenge. They can cause serious damage, including organ and tissue damage, infection, paralysis, severe bleeding, and broken bones.³⁷ Moreover, victims of nonfatal gunshot injuries are frequently readmitted to hospitals, particularly those who suffered gunshots in the abdomen or thorax,³⁸ because of complications derived from their gunshot injury. Furthermore, gunshot victims are 5 times more likely to require blood transfusion and require 10 times more blood units. They are also 14 times more likely to die because of their injury than patients of stab wounds, motor vehicle crashes, nonfirearm assaults, or falls.³⁹ Overall, it is estimated that initial inpatient hospitalizations for firearm-related injuries cost up to \$735 million every year.⁴⁰ However, the physical and emotional damage extends far beyond initial injury. In addition to the long-term physical consequences and hospitalizations, survivors of nonfatal gunshot injuries often face a multitude of challenges, from posttraumatic stress disorder, substance misuse, and unemployment, to name a few.⁴¹ Moreover, studies have shown that those who survive gunshot injuries are also at risk of being involved with future gun-related violence.⁴²

FIGURE 3

Nonfatal gun injuries are a major problem in Michigan

Nonfatal gun injuries per 100,000 people, 2017



Source: Center for American Progress analysis of Everytown For Gun Safety, "EveryStat: How does gun violence impact the communities you care about?", available at <https://everystat.org/> (last accessed January 2022)

4. Alarming numbers of women are killed by intimate partners with a gun

While men are more likely to be murdered by strangers, women are more likely to be killed by someone they know.⁴³ In most cases, the aggressor is an intimate partner. According to data from the FBI, from 2010 to 2019, 47 percent of homicides of women nationally were perpetrated by their current or former intimate partner.⁴⁴ Here too, guns play a major role. Studies show that women in abusive relationships are five times more likely to be killed if their male abuser has access to firearms.⁴⁵ Nationally, 56 percent of women killed by an intimate partner are murdered with a gun.⁴⁶

These tragedies are all too common in Michigan. Data from the FBI indicate that from 2010 to 2019, 33 percent of homicides of women in Michigan involved a current or former intimate partner. Out of those, 57 percent were perpetrated with a firearm.⁴⁷ This means that 1 in every 5 homicides of women in Michigan involves a current or former intimate partner with a gun.

1 in every 5 homicides of women in Michigan are perpetrated by an intimate partner with a gun.

In July 2021, a 36-year-old woman was allegedly shot and killed by her boyfriend in Auburn Hills. The incident reportedly occurred during an argument while the victim's 13-year-old son was sleeping in the next room.⁴⁸ Seven months earlier in the city of Detroit, a 32-year-old man allegedly used a shotgun to fatally shoot his wife, a 31-year-old preschool teacher, during a verbal argument at their shared apartment.⁴⁹ The man was charged with first degree murder, tampering with evidence, and two counts of felony firearm.⁵⁰ In November 2019, a day after celebrating her 20th birthday, a woman was sitting in her car in Warren when she was fatally shot—allegedly by her 18-year-old boyfriend.⁵¹ The suspect was arrested and charged with not only first degree murder but also carrying a concealed weapon and felony firearm charges.⁵² Unfortunately, these are just a few stories of the numerous women who are killed by an intimate partner with a gun every year.⁵³

Men can also be victims of fatal intimate partner violence, if at lower rates than women. From 2010 to 2019, 4 percent of male homicide deaths in Michigan were perpetrated by an intimate partner, and roughly half of those were committed with a firearm.⁵⁴

Furthermore, LGBTQ people are victims of intimate partner violence at the same or even higher rates than people who identify as heterosexual.⁵⁵ While there are limited data, stories indicate that transgender women in Michigan are frequently the target of deadly hate crimes perpetrated by strangers, often with guns. According to reports from the Human Rights Campaign, at least two transgender women were fatally shot in Michigan during 2019.⁵⁶ In fact, Detroit is one of the U.S. cities with the highest volume of fatal violence against transgender people.⁵⁷

5. A staggering number of stolen guns are used to commit violence

Michigan has taken important steps to combat gun violence by requiring individuals to promptly report any missing or stolen firearms. However, firearms continue to be stolen with staggering frequency and are often recovered only after crimes have been committed. Data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives show that from 2012 to 2020, more than 1,700 firearms were stolen from licensed gun dealers in Michigan. In November 2020, for example, 49 firearms were reported stolen from a gun store in Alpena, Michigan, during a break-in. Perpetrators threw a brick through a front glass window during the night, entering the store after business hours.⁵⁸

But the issue extends beyond gun theft from gun dealers. In fact, most guns are stolen from private individuals. According to estimates based on FBI data, from 2010 to 2019, close to 60,000 firearms were stolen from private owners in Michigan.⁵⁹ This means that approximately 16 firearms are stolen every day from residences, vehicles, and other locations. This figure is likely an undercount, as many reporting agencies do not provide their data to the FBI. Furthermore, only about 6 percent of those firearms were recovered. This is not a minor issue, considering that stolen guns are likely to be diverted to criminal markets within Michigan or other states.⁶⁰

Michigan's volume of stolen firearms appears to be concentrated in a few counties. The FBI data suggest that from 2010 to 2019, 64 percent of guns stolen in Michigan were taken in just 10 of the state's 83 counties.⁶¹ As shown in Figure 4, Wayne County alone experienced close to 24 percent of gun thefts during that period. Counties such as Genesee, Macomb, Oakland, Kent, and Ingham also reported high numbers: More than 2,000 guns were reported stolen from each county from 2010 to 2019.

TABLE 1

Top 10 Michigan counties with the highest estimated value and number of stolen firearms, 2010–2019

	Value of stolen firearms	Estimated number of stolen firearms
Wayne County	6,559,847	14,577
Genesee County	2,216,094	4,925
Macomb County	1,911,296	4,247
Oakland County	1,657,765	3,684
Kent County	1,183,003	2,629
Ingham County	940,697	2,090
Saginaw County	752,583	1,672
Washtenaw County	663,317	1,474
Muskegon County	663,082	1,474
Calhoun County	652,986	1,451

* To estimate the value of stolen firearms, the author used an average value of \$450 per firearm. For more information on this figure, see Chelsea Parsons and Eugenio Weigend Vargas, "Stolen Guns in America: A State-by-State Analysis" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2017), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2017/07/25/436533/stolen-guns-america/>.

Source: Center for American Progress analysis of data from "Jacob Kaplan's Concatenated Files: Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program Data: Property Stolen and Recovered (Supplemental to Return A) 1960-2019" (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2019), available at <https://www.openicpsr.org/openicpsr/project/105403/version/V6/view>.

6. Armed extremists pose a threat in Michigan

2020 saw a surge in armed extremist activity across the United States, much of which took the form of protests against restrictive COVID-19 ordinances and misinformation around the 2020 election results. The Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, in partnership with the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), documented 560 armed demonstrations from January 2020 to June 2021 and found that events where protesters brought guns were six times more likely to turn violent than unarmed demonstrations.⁶² This research found that violence occurred in 1 in every 37 unarmed protests but in 1 in every 6 protests in which firearms were involved.

Michigan has been at the center of these armed protests. On April 30, 2020, hundreds of armed protestors gathered around the Michigan State Capitol to protest the COVID-19 stay-at-home order as lawmakers debated whether to extend emergency powers during the pandemic.⁶³ The demonstration was the third armed protest since Michigan announced its emergency stay-at-home order. The crowd of protestors—many carrying rifles and swastika posters and

chanting anti-government slogans—stormed the Capitol building and attempted to break into the House chambers, threatening Capitol police staff, press, and lawmakers. After a few hours, protestors were asked to leave. In another example, in Owosso in May 2020, a group of armed militia members patrolled outside a barber shop whose owner refused to close in accordance with the governor’s COVID-19 shut-down order, asserting that they were there to prevent police from forcibly closing the business.⁶⁴ According to Everytown and ACLED, from January 2020 to June 2021, there were 11 armed protests in Michigan, the highest number across all 50 states.⁶⁵

Overall, the combination of misinformation, radical views, and access to guns contributes to the intimidation of elected officials and communities in, and the governability of, the state of Michigan. There was even a recent plot to kidnap Gov. Whitmer. Fortunately, it never materialized, and the plotters were arrested.⁶⁶ Lawmakers in Michigan have since introduced bills to ban anyone from carrying a firearm either openly or concealed inside the state Capitol building.⁶⁷ These bills have not yet passed the state Senate, but in early 2021, the Michigan State Capitol Commission passed a motion that bans open carry in the Capitol. This ban does not apply to grounds surrounding the Capitol or to other public buildings.

Recommendations

While Michigan has enacted some strong gun laws, there is still much that can be done to prevent gun violence and protect all communities across the state. The following actions and policies should be implemented to complement efforts the state has already taken.

Engage in better data collection and dissemination

To understand and prevent gun violence, data compilation and dissemination are fundamental. While police agencies in Michigan report data to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR),⁶⁸ the state could collect and present the data as well. For example, data on homicides can be compiled, analyzed, and reported. These reports would include the breakdown of homicides by type of weapon, as well as victim and offender demographics; relationships between victims and offenders; and other characteristics of crimes. The state could also compile data on the value and number of stolen firearms from each police agency and provide reports around this challenge.

Furthermore, information on nonfatal gunshot injuries has been a major limitation in the United States, and there is no centralized system for tracking these injuries.⁶⁹ However, some states have taken actions to collect this information. For example, the Virginia Department of Health compiles and disseminates information on injuries. The data are broken down by mechanism, including a category for guns; geography level, including locality, region, health district, and state; and intent of the injury, including homicide, suicide, unintentional, and undetermined.⁷⁰ Michigan should implement similar efforts. In addition, it should compile and report on the use of guns in hate crimes. Finally, following efforts to address data gaps around gun violence at the national level,⁷¹ the state could facilitate a state-level working group to assess data needs as well as possible ways to close data gaps.

Expand support for community-based intervention programs

Community-based violence intervention programs are vital to addressing the gun violence epidemic, particularly in urban areas and in underresourced Black and Latino communities. By empowering impacted communities and applying a localized approach to gun violence prevention, these programs help identify those individuals at risk of being perpetrators or victims of violence, particularly in neighborhoods in large cities, and work to reduce that risk through intervention.⁷² Across the nation, cities have been implementing community-based intervention programs. Cities that have adopted programs such as Advance Peace, Group Violence Intervention, Cure Violence, and hospital-based interventions have seen a significant reduction in deaths and shootings in neighborhoods most affected by gun violence.⁷³ To combat gun violence, Michigan must invest in community-driven, evidence-based interventions.

Gov. Whitmer has taken steps to support community-based programs to prevent retaliatory violence in the city of Detroit.⁷⁴ Policymakers and local leaders should extend these efforts in other counties by facilitating grants for community organizations to develop, build, and replicate evidence-based violence interruption programs, including hospital-based violence intervention initiatives, street outreach programs, and group violence intervention programs that seek to proactively interrupt cycles of violence. This support should be targeted toward communities with high rates of gun homicides against young Black people, as well as communities with high rates of nonfatal gunshot injuries.

Implement extreme risk protection laws

Recently, Democratic lawmakers in Michigan have attempted to pass laws to implement extreme risk protection orders, also known as ERPO laws. Unfortunately, these attempts have stalled without even moving to a hearing.⁷⁵

ERPO laws allow families, law enforcement officers, and other community members to petition a court to temporarily prohibit individuals who represent an imminent risk of harm to themselves or others, based on demonstrable behaviors, from buying or possessing a firearm. Considering that 80 percent of people with suicidal thoughts show some sign of their intentions,⁷⁶ this could be an effective measure to mitigate the growing trends of gun suicide in Michigan.

In fact, the implementation of these laws has contributed to reductions in gun suicides in other states. A 2018 study found that the implementation of ERPO laws in Indiana was associated with a 7.5 percent reduction in gun suicides during the first 10 years of enactment.⁷⁷ This same study found that implementation of ERPO laws in Connecticut was associated with a 13.5 percent reduction in gun suicide rates from 2007 to 2015.⁷⁸ Data from Connecticut show that for every 10 to 20 ERPOs issued, at least one life is saved.⁷⁹

Nonetheless, an ERPO law in Michigan must be preceded by actions that ensure equitable implementation. Examples of these actions include a policy impact assessment that detects unintended consequences for minority groups, the creation of a multidisciplinary implementation working group, constant police training, adequate data collection, and recurrent evaluations.⁸⁰ Additionally, these actions must be consistently assessed to ensure equitable application of the law.

Protect people from domestic abusers

The combination of access to firearms and intimate partner violence is fatal for many people. However, Michigan has not enacted a series of crucial measures that would help ensure that domestic abusers do not have access to firearms. For those affected by intimate partner violence, an abusive partner's ability to access firearms can have fatal consequences. In fact, research shows that when an abusive partner has access to a gun, women are five times more likely to be killed.⁸¹ Furthermore, the mere presence of a gun in an abusive relationship is often a source of emotional trauma and psychological abuse.⁸²

While Michigan has passed certain restrictions on domestic abusers' access to firearms, several critical loopholes still exist that leave victims of intimate partner violence vulnerable to gun violence. Currently, Michigan does not require people charged with domestic violence misdemeanors to relinquish their firearms, nor does it require the mandatory reporting of violent misdemeanors to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) database.⁸³ Michigan should take the fundamental step of enacting laws to close these gaps.

Additionally, while the state prohibits individuals with domestic violence restraining orders against them from owning or possessing firearms, these prohibitions only apply after the issuance of a final order. They do not apply when a temporary order of protection is issued following an initial court appearance.⁸⁴ Women are particularly vulnerable to deadly attacks by intimate partners immediately after

restraining orders are issued. In fact, about one-fifth of women who were victims of intimate partner violence and had restraining orders against their abusers were killed within two days of an order being issued.⁸⁵ Current Michigan law gives courts the authority to prohibit individuals from buying or possessing guns upon the issuance of a temporary order of protection, but courts are not required to do so and there are concerns that these actions are rarely authorized.⁸⁶ Michigan should mandate firearm purchase and possession prohibitions when a protection order is first issued.

Finally, the state should support and increase funding for victims of domestic violence. This includes culturally relevant support services that incorporate the voices and experiences of survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

Promote safe storage practices

Safe storage is the practice of keeping firearms away from individuals who should not have access to those weapons, reducing both gun-related deaths and nonfatal injuries. In this regard, experts agree that there are three key methods to follow. These are to unload firearms, lock up guns, and store ammunition and firearms separately.⁸⁷ Unfortunately, too few gun owners follow these steps. In fact, more than 50 percent of U.S. gun owners report that they do not store their firearms in a safe manner.⁸⁸ However, safe storage practices have been linked to lower risks of injuries. A 2005 study found that safe storage practices significantly reduced the risk of gun injuries for both children and teenagers.⁸⁹ Similarly, a 2017 study concluded that individuals who do not store their firearms safely are at a higher risk of being victims of gun theft.⁹⁰

One way Michigan can reduce nonfatal gun injuries—particularly among young people—gun theft, and accidental deaths is to implement laws that hold gun owners accountable if an unlocked firearm is involved in a crime or if there is an incident where a child gains access to a firearm. Additionally, the state can implement actions to promote safe storage practices. For example, mandatory training on safe storage practices could be added as a requirement to obtain a permit to purchase a handgun. Furthermore, health care providers and schools should be encouraged to speak about safe storage practices and steps that minors should take when they encounter a firearm.

Require a state license and security measures for federally licensed firearm dealers

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has expressed concern over the growing levels of gun theft from federal firearm licensees (FFLs). These firearms are often used in crimes or trafficked across states. From 2012 to 2020, more than 15,000 guns recovered in crimes in the United States were reported stolen or missing from federally licensed dealers.⁹¹ Michigan is no exception: From 2012 to 2019, more than 1,700 firearms were taken from licensed gun dealers. During that same period, at least 317 firearms stolen from gun dealers were recovered after crimes perpetrated in Michigan.⁹²

Gun theft from dealers often occurs during burglaries and after business hours. Additionally, the ease with which burglars can steal guns from FFLs is facilitated by a lack of security measures such as protective fences or alarm systems. Burglars see dealers as easy targets often only protected by a glass window that can easily be broken.⁹³ Michigan should take steps to mitigate this threat. First, it should require dealers to obtain a state license, a measure implemented by 16 states and Washington, D.C.⁹⁴ To obtain that license, dealers should be mandated to lock up firearms after business hours and implement strong security measures, such as protective fences or alarm systems.⁹⁵

Prohibit both open and concealed gun carrying at certain sensitive locations

Carrying firearms in public spaces often increases the likelihood of conflict, putting public safety at risk. Research shows that the visible presence of guns in public increases the risk of aggressive behavior among individuals and can quickly turn everyday interactions into fatal altercations.⁹⁶ Additionally, research has shown that laws that allow for the carrying of concealed guns are associated with higher levels of gun violence.⁹⁷ Therefore, policies that restrict the carrying of firearms in sensitive locations are important. In this regard, restricting gun carrying in public already has significant buy-in. Survey data reveal that more than two-thirds of U.S. adults support restrictions on carrying firearms in public spaces such as college campuses, government buildings, schools, bars, and places of worship.⁹⁸

Many states have taken steps to address this problem. As of September 2021, Illinois, South Dakota, and South Carolina prohibit both the open and concealed carrying of guns inside government-owned buildings. Similarly, 14 states prohibit

both open and concealed gun carrying in state Capitol buildings, state Houses, and/or state offices.⁹⁹ After the 2020 armed demonstrations, the Michigan State Capitol Commission banned open carry in public areas inside the Capitol building, with an exemption for law enforcement officers and those with a valid concealed carry license.¹⁰⁰ In May 2021, the commission voted to extend this ban to prohibit anyone outside law enforcement from carrying a concealed weapon on public Capitol grounds, even with the proper permits.¹⁰¹ While these are prudent steps to protect public well-being, Michigan must strengthen these efforts and enact laws that ban the open and concealed carrying of guns on all government grounds, in all publicly operated spaces, and during civic demonstrations. For example, Virginia recently passed a law that created an exception to a state preemption law, allowing localities to limit gun carrying in certain publicly operated spaces such as local parks or buildings used for governmental purposes.¹⁰²

Conclusion

In Michigan, a person is killed with a gun every eight hours, and every two hours, a person is nonfatally injured with a gun. While the state has taken some steps to address this stark reality, gun violence in Michigan remains a significant public health challenge that needs the attention of leadership. Many actions and policies, including those listed in this report, can be implemented to reduce gun violence and keep communities and individuals in Michigan safe. Unfortunately, although attempts to pass some of these measures have been made, they have often stalled or been blocked in the state legislature. State leaders, particularly those opposing such measures, must do more to further reduce gun violence in the Great Lakes State.

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Endnotes

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