

April 9, 2018

Leon County Board of Commissioners
301 S. Monroe Street, 5th Floor
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Dear Board of County Commissioners,

On behalf of Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, I urge you to support the ordinance scheduled for discussion on April 10 which would require prospective firearm purchasers to undergo a background check and five day waiting period if any part of the transaction is conducted on county property. Giffords Law Center was founded by lawyers in the wake of a 1993 assault weapon massacre in San Francisco. For 25 years, Giffords Law Center – now led by former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords and Captain Mark Kelly – has been providing legal and policy expertise in support of gun violence prevention to federal, state, and local legislators nationwide.

Background checks enforce the laws already on the books by ensuring that people who are prohibited by law from purchasing or possessing firearms cannot easily acquire them from an unlicensed seller. Neither federal nor Florida law require an individual to undergo a background check before purchasing a firearm if they are purchasing the gun from an unlicensed individual. Accordingly, in Florida, it is far too easy for dangerous individuals who would otherwise be prohibited from purchasing or possessing firearms to gain access. The proposed ordinance would help promote public safety in Leon County by requiring that all individuals purchasing guns on county property undergo a background check.

Background checks are effective. Since the federal background check requirement took effect in 1994, over 3 million prohibited people--the majority of whom are convicted felons, domestic abusers, or dangerously mentally ill--have been prevented from purchasing a gun.ⁱ Background checks have proven to be one of the most effective gun violence prevention tools available, but, due to lax federal and state laws, studies estimate that between 20 and 40 percent of gun owners acquired their most recent firearm without clearing a background check.ⁱⁱ

The American public understand the importance of background checks and their impact on public safety. A February 2018 survey by Quinnipiac University found that 97% of all Americans and 97% of gun owners support requiring background checks on all gun sales.ⁱⁱⁱ

Waiting periods are an effective means of reducing gun violence. Currently, Florida requires individuals purchasing guns from a licensed dealer to wait a minimum of three days before taking possession of a firearm. The Leon County ordinance would extend this waiting period to five days, thus improving the law. Waiting periods help reduce the occurrence of suicides and other impulsive acts of violence. Suicides constitute two-thirds of all gun deaths in the U.S., with more than 21,000 suicides by firearm per year. In 2016—the most recent year for which data is

available—1,672 Floridians lost their lives to gun suicide.^{iv} Guns are an extremely common means of suicide; half of all suicides in the U.S. are carried out with a firearm.^v

When compared to other means of attempting suicide, guns are uniquely lethal. More than 90% of suicide attempts with a firearm result in death.^{vi} Suicide attempts by jumping, in comparison, carry a 34% fatality rate, and attempts by drug poisoning only a 2% fatality rate.^{vii} In other words, a person who attempts suicide by a method other than firearm is more likely to live than a person who uses a gun. Keeping a gun away from a person in the throes of a temporary crisis, therefore, is likely to prevent that person from dying by suicide.

In fact, states with waiting period laws for gun purchases have lower rates of suicide. Research published in the American Journal of Public Health showed that states with waiting period laws had 51% fewer firearm suicides and a 27% lower overall suicide rate than states without such laws.^{viii} When South Dakota repealed its 48-hour waiting period for handgun purchases in 2009, overall suicides the following year increased by 7.6%.^{ix} **Waiting period laws have also been shown to reduce gun homicides. One study found that waiting period laws reduce gun homicides by 17%.**^x Americans strongly support waiting periods for firearm purchases. The same Quinnipiac University poll found that 83% of Americans support waiting periods for firearm purchases.^{xi}

For the aforementioned reasons, we strongly urge you to vote “aye” to enact this life-saving ordinance.

Sincerely,

Allison Anderman
Managing Attorney
Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence

ⁱ Jennifer Karberg et al., “Background Checks for Firearm Transfers, 2013-14—Statistical Tables,” US Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics, June 2016, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/bcft1314st.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Miller, M., Hepburn, L., & Azrael, D. (2017). Firearm Acquisition Without Background Checks. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 166(4), 233-239.

ⁱⁱⁱ Quinnipiac University Poll (Feb. 20, 2018), at <https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=2521>.

^{iv} Centers for Disease Control, Fatal Injury Reports, 2016.

^v In 2015 there were 22,018 suicides by firearm (out of a total of 44,193 suicides), and in 2014 there were 21,334 suicides by firearm (out of a total of 42,773 suicides). Nat'l Ctr. for Injury Prevention & Control, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Web-Based Injury Statistics Query & Reporting System (WISQARS) Injury Mortality Reports, 1999-2014, for National and Regional (last visited Nov. 9, 2016), www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html.

^{vi} A. Elnour and J. Harrison, "Lethality of Suicide Methods," *Inj Prev* 14 (2008): 39-45, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18245314>; Matthew Miller et al., "The Epidemiology of Case Fatality Rates for Suicide in the Northeast," *Annals Of Emergency Med.* 43 no. 6 (2004): 723-30, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15159703>.

^{vii} *Id.*

^{viii} Michael D. Anestis and Joye C. Anestis, "Suicide Rates and State Laws Regulating Access and Exposure to Handguns," *Am. J of Pub. Health* 105 no. 10, (2015): 2049-58, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26270305>.

^{ix} *Id.*

^x Michael Luca, Deepak Malhotra, and Christopher Poliquin, "Handgun Waiting Periods Reduce Gun Deaths," *PNAS* (2017): 1-4.

^{xi} *Supra*, endnote iii.