



Common Sense Policies to Reduce Gun Violence in Illinois

The statistics are appalling: Chicago has the highest youth homicide rate in the country. Of all homicides in Chicago in 2008, 80 percent were the result of gunfire. Firearm injuries are the second-leading cause of injury-related deaths in the country, second only to motor vehicle injuries. In addition, more than half of all suicides were committed with handguns, while 68% of suicides for youth ages 15-24 involved a gun.

Every crime related gunshot wound carries a societal cost of \$1 million, while the total societal cost of gun violence in Chicago is \$2.5 billion annually.

Illinois has enacted its share of gun violence policies intended to create safer communities. Most recently, the General Assembly passed a bill in 2009 that requires the mandatory revocation of FOID cards when a person is served an order of protection. Yet, other good measures didn't get far in the legislative process, and we need to be doing much more and much more quickly.

If elected to the Illinois legislature, I would pursue the following policies:

1. Universal Background Checks

We must ensure that people who are legally barred from owning a gun can't avoid background checks when trying to buy a gun. Currently, unlicensed, private sellers of firearms in Illinois aren't required to perform background checks on gun purchasers, unlike their federally licensed, commercial counterparts. This loophole annually allows thousands of guns to get into the hands of criminals who wouldn't be able to pass a background check.

Requiring background checks for all private sales would reduce illegal trafficking and treat all gun transfers equally. Exceptions include firearm transfers between spouses, from parent to child, or grandparent to grandchild.

2. Reporting Firearm Loss or Theft

Many guns used in crimes were originally stolen or lost. Therefore, it makes sense requiring lawful gun owners to report lost or stolen firearms to local law enforcement agencies. This practice would allow law enforcement to focus efforts on disrupting this source of illegal guns. Illinois needs a law that would require FOID card holders to report the loss or theft of their handgun to local law enforcement agencies within 72 hours after discovering the loss or theft.

3. Restricting Bulk Handgun Sales to Deter Illegal Trafficking

Studies show that handguns sold in bulk sales to the same individual purchaser are frequently used in crime. Often traffickers will buy guns in bulk and sell them on the street in states with more restrictive gun laws.

I support limiting handgun sales to 12 per year (or 24 per couple). This will cut off a source of illegal handguns but doesn't impact law-abiding citizens. Collectors could seek an exemption to enable them to purchase larger quantities, and, hunters and sportsmen wouldn't be affected since the policy wouldn't regulate shotguns and rifles.

3. Requiring Safe Storage of Firearms to Prevent Access by Children Up to Age 18

Having unlocked guns in the home increases a child's risk of both accidental gun injuries and intentional shootings, according to research. Proper gun storage to restrict children's access is a key to preventing unintentional firearm deaths, injuries, and suicides by children and young people. "Child access prevention" laws that hold adults responsible for failing to properly store firearms in the home to prevent access by children have been shown to be effective in lowering the incidence of unintentional firearm deaths among children.

Currently in Illinois, it's unlawful for a person to store or leave a gun unlocked and accessible to a minor under the age of 14 if that person knows or has reason to believe the minor is likely to gain access to the firearm. I advocate strengthening this law to apply to homes with older teenagers as well. This will help lower the incidence of gun-related deaths among children.

5. Licensing Handgun Dealers

While Illinois licenses a diverse array of businesses to ensure they comply with state laws and safeguard health and safety, handgun dealers aren't one of them. It's true gun dealers are licensed by the federal government, but federal oversight is inadequate. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has found that a major source of trafficked guns is federally licensed firearms dealers who violate federal laws, but the agency lacks the resources to conduct regular inspections of such dealers.

I support legislation that would require handgun dealers to obtain a state license, thus treating them like many other categories of businesses licensed by the state. Licensed dealers would have to undergo a background check to confirm they're eligible to possess firearms, document every handgun transfer.

Sources:

Illinois Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, www.icpgv.org

Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence, www.ichv.org

Legal Community Against Violence, www.lcav.org

Chicago Youth Gun Violence Initiative,

www.crimelab.uchicago.edu/pdf/Gun_Violence_Report.pdf