



Boldly Confronting the Gun Violence Epidemic: Solutions to Save Lives

Nearly three Virginians die from gun violence every day and more than 1,000 lives are lost each year. Thousands more Virginians are injured by gun violence each year, the vast majority of whom are young Black men.¹ For too long, families in Virginia and across the nation have experienced unspeakable heartbreak on a daily basis due to these senseless acts of violence. That is why Terry has always fought for commonsense policy solutions -- because even one preventable death is too many in the Commonwealth. It is past time to act boldly, save lives and prevent more families from feeling this anguish. As Virginia's next Governor, Terry will continue to champion bold, lifesaving initiatives to address this epidemic head-on.

Terry has, and always will be, a champion for gun violence prevention. As the first southern Governor to be elected after proudly running with an "F" rating from the NRA, Terry knows Virginians want bold, decisive action. As Virginia's 72nd Governor, Terry took strong action when the Republican-controlled legislature refused to step up to the plate. He signed an Executive Order banning guns in most state buildings, proposed numerous commonsense bills, vetoed 18 radical Republican bills that would have further weakened Virginia's lax gun laws, and passed the first meaningful gun safety laws in decades. The bipartisan agreement he signed included a domestic violence law that was one of the toughest in the nation, as well as a law to keep guns out of the wrong hands by requiring the Virginia State Police to be present at every gun show in the Commonwealth to run voluntary background checks on private sales.

During the 2020 legislative session, under Governor Northam's leadership and with the Democratic-controlled legislature, Virginia finally passed critical legislation that will undoubtedly save lives and address the daily gun violence in our communities. After decades of advocacy, Virginia now requires background checks on all gun sales, prevents individuals who are a danger to themselves or others from accessing firearms, allows localities to regulate firearms, prevents domestic abusers from accessing firearms, prevents children from accessing firearms, and a number of other significant measures. These are critically important

¹ Hobron, Rosie, and Lauren Yerkes. "Gun Violence in Virginia." Virginia Department of Health, [vscc.virginia.gov/OCME_VDH_Gun_Violence_in_Virginia_\(Non-Fatal_and_Fatal\).pdf](https://vscc.virginia.gov/OCME_VDH_Gun_Violence_in_Virginia_(Non-Fatal_and_Fatal).pdf).

advancements, but the next governor will have to build on these successes and take a holistic approach that recognizes gun violence as the public health epidemic it is.

A public health approach allows us to move from tackling this problem by trying to change human behavior, which we know is not cost effective, to developing a system that makes it less likely for Virginians to be injured. Combining this approach with strong gun safety laws will allow us to combat violence in our communities. Strong interagency coordination, research and education campaigns are critical to keeping the public informed and preventing tragedies. Terry is ready to get to work and continue delivering a safer Commonwealth for all Virginians.

Take Bold Action to Save Lives

Virginia took important steps during the 2020 legislative session and passed a number of life-saving bills, but much work remains to be done. We have to continue fighting until we require background checks on transfers of ownership, prohibit future sales of assault weapons, and people across the Commonwealth no longer live in fear about the daily gun violence in their communities. As governor, Terry will continue to fight for commonsense solutions to preventing gun violence and will create and fund innovative solutions to address the daily gun violence in our communities. Terry's plan will:

- **Ban the sale of military-style assault firearms and high-capacity magazines.** Virginia has experienced firsthand the detrimental effects of gun violence. We have lived through horrific tragedies at Virginia Tech and in Virginia Beach. No family should have to experience such anguish again. Military-style, semi-automatic assault firearms with high-capacity magazines are weapons of war and have no place on our streets. These weapons are specifically designed to increase lethality and are often used during mass shootings because they allow a person who wants to harm people to quickly claim lives. The 2020 Virginia General Assembly failed to pass critical legislation that would have prohibited all future sales of these weapons and banned magazines that hold more than 10 rounds of ammunition. Terry was not afraid to stand up to extremist groups like the NRA when he ran for, and served as Virginia's 72nd Governor, and he's not afraid now. He will take bold action and get this life-saving legislation passed.
- **Strengthen Virginia's background check law.** After decades of advocacy, the Democratic-controlled legislature finally passed sweeping legislation to require background checks on all firearms sales during the 2020 General Assembly session. This monumental bill closed dangerous loopholes in Virginia law that previously only required dealers with a Federal Firearms License to perform background checks prior to selling a gun, and allowed people to buy guns at gun shows, online, or from private sellers without undergoing a background check. We know that background checks save lives because they keep guns out of the hands of people who should not have them. Now that Virginia has required background checks on all gun sales, we must expand the law to cover transfers of ownership. It's simple. If you want to give a gun to a friend, the person receiving it should have to undergo a background check. We also need to ensure the law is clear that individuals under the age of 21 cannot purchase handguns, period. Terry will further explore the possibility of requiring waiting periods when a person purchases a

firearm, and implementing a permit-to-purchase law. Terry will close these dangerous loopholes and protect Virginians.

- **Prohibit open carry of firearms in certain public spaces and allow localities to intervene when there are public safety threats.** Virginia passed legislation during the 2020 legislative session allowing localities to regulate firearms in certain spaces, like in government buildings and during permitted events. While this was a critical step forward, events like the deadly insurrection in the U.S. Capitol building and the deadly events in Charlottesville led by white supremacists in 2017 demonstrate that we must do more to protect our citizens. More and more, extremist groups are descending on places like government buildings and polling places with swaths of firearms to intimidate the public, or incite violence. This has to end now. It's simple: guns have no place in our democratic process. People have a constitutional right to participate in the government process. Accordingly, public spaces that belong to the people should remain safe, open and welcoming spaces for children and people of all ages. Additionally, local leaders should have broader authority to prohibit open carry in their jurisdictions when there are credible public safety threats. Terry recognizes that the constant presence of dangerous firearms erodes people's ability to feel safe and exercise their right to participate in the government process. As governor, Terry will take action to protect our citizens by prohibiting open carry in certain public spaces and giving local leaders the flexibility they need to protect their communities.
- **Prevent domestic abusers from accessing firearms.** Under federal law, any person who is convicted of domestic violence misdemeanor is barred from purchasing or possessing firearms. Unfortunately, Virginia has not enacted a similar law, meaning that someone with this type of conviction is prohibited from purchasing a firearm, but Virginia law enforcement cannot enforce that prohibition on possession. We know that guns and domestic violence are a lethal combination, especially for women. Nearly half of all female murder victims in the U.S. are killed by a current or former intimate partner.² Additionally, women are five times more likely to die in domestic violence situations when there is a firearm in the home.³ Terry will act immediately to close this dangerous loophole and keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers.
- **Ban "Ghost Guns" and all other undetectable firearms in Virginia.** "Ghost guns" are guns sold in parts or kits, the sale of which is not currently regulated in the same manner as fully assembled firearms. They are intentionally sold (or produced at home with 3-D printers) to circumvent essential federal and state public safety laws, and represent a growing and dangerous public safety threat. These guns are not sold or produced with serial numbers, as are all other fully finished firearms. Without serial numbers, law enforcement cannot trace critical manufacture and sale information if they are used in the commission of a crime. These firearms are therefore very attractive to individuals who

² "Domestic Violence and Firearms." The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence, 28 Oct. 2020, efsgv.org/learn/type-of-gun-violence/domestic-violence-and-firearms/.

³ "Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results From a Multisite Case Control Study." American Public Health Association (APHA) Publications, 10 Oct. 2011, ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.93.7.1089.

are otherwise prohibited by law enforcement from possessing or accessing firearms. Additionally, guns produced by 3-D printers may not be detectable by x-ray machines and could be attractive to young children. When 21 kids are shot every day and four die each day in the U.S. from gun violence, we must take every step possible to prevent these weapons from getting into the hands of our most vulnerable Virginians.⁴ These dangerous weapons must be banned in Virginia and Terry will work with the legislature to get it done.

- **Close the “hate crime” loophole.** Terry knows all too well that despite our efforts to create a welcoming and open Commonwealth, hatred and bigotry remain alive and well here and nationally. From the hateful events in Charlottesville in 2017 that led to the deaths of Heather Heyer, Virginia State Police Lieutenant Jay Cullen and Virginia State Police Trooper-Pilot Berke Bates, to the domestic terrorist insurrection at our U.S. Capitol in 2021, we must take more aggressive action to combat this hate and protect Virginians. In 2019, Virginia law enforcement agencies reported 185 hate crimes to the Virginia State Police, an increase from 161 in 2018.⁵ This demonstrates that more and more, people are being victimized as a result of hate and bigotry. Virginians should feel safe knowing they will not be targeted for what they look like, who they love, where they come from, or how they worship. The vast majority of hate crimes in Virginia involve racial bias, but nearly 20 percent of hate crimes target the LGBTQ community. It is time we disarm hate. Terry will close the hate crime loophole, ensuring individuals who commit hate crimes against others due to their race, religion, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, place of origin, or ability status are prohibited from purchasing, possessing, or transporting a firearm.

Treat Gun Violence as a Public Health Epidemic

Too many Virginians and families suffer on a daily basis because of rampant gun violence in our communities. That includes self-harm, interpersonal violence, and unintentional shootings that result in over 1,000 deaths annually and thousands of injuries. Nearly two-thirds of gun deaths in Virginia are the result of suicide and one-third are homicides, whereas the vast majority of gun-related injuries are either assaults or are the result of unintentional gunfire. We know that victims of violence are at-risk of violent re-injury or death. In fact, one study indicated that 45% of victims were re-injured within five years, and after five years, nearly 20% of the original victims had died.⁶ This same study indicated that victims of violence were also more likely to become perpetrators of violence. The introduction of firearms into violent situations only increases lethality. This deadly cycle claims the lives of too many people each year, and puts a tremendous burden on our healthcare and criminal justice systems. Every gun-related death or injury is preventable, and we must employ a public health approach to understand the root causes of gun violence and implement strategies to intervene and save lives. Terry’s plan will:

⁴ “Key Statistics.” Brady, Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, www.bradyunited.org/key-statistics.

⁵ “Crime in Virginia 2018.” Uniform Crime Reporting Section, Department of State Police.

⁶ Purtle, Jonathan. “Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs Save Lives and Money.” *Trauma Acute Care Surgery*, vol. 75, no. 2, 2013, comidkenya.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/JoT-2013-Purtle-HVIPs-Save-Lives-and-Money.pdf.

- **Create the Virginia Office of Gun Violence Prevention at the state level to support interagency collaboration and local prevention efforts.** In order to truly recognize gun violence as the public health crisis it is, we have to create an office of gun violence prevention at the state level. While many state agencies have resources and staff to address various forms of violence, this work can be siloed and issue-specific. In order to truly prevent gun violence in the Commonwealth, we must ensure strong coordination across state agencies and build a statewide framework to address the underlying causes of gun violence in our communities. That includes collaborating with localities to identify the root causes of gun violence, and partnering with public safety, health, behavioral health and education agencies to implement data-driven solutions that improve safety and reduce gun-related deaths and injuries. As Governor, Terry will create the Virginia Office of Gun Violence Prevention that will collect and synthesize research, develop a statewide framework for preventing gun violence, and coordinate with other state and local agencies to save lives.
- **Partner with a Virginia Institution of Higher Education (IHE) to establish a Center of Excellence for Violence Prevention.** For many years, the federal government stripped critical funding that actively prevented the Centers for Disease Control from using its research to determine data-driven solutions around gun violence prevention, likely for fear that their work would demonstrate exactly what we all already know; guns are the cause of violence, not the answer to it. Because of this, we have missed out on decades of opportunities to keep the public informed and implement evidence-based strategies in place to prevent all violence, including gun violence, in our communities. Virginia's IHEs have a long history of research excellence and as Virginia continues to adopt and consider additional much-needed policy and programmatic solutions to address violence, it is critical that we have the infrastructure in place to research the effectiveness of various solutions and invest resources accordingly. We must also ensure that our research is grounded in equity and so that we can better understand how various policies and programs impact the diverse communities across the Commonwealth. As governor, Terry will partner with one of our IHEs to build a research Center of Excellence that will help to keep our communities safe in an equitable way.
- **Expand Violence Intervention and Prevention Programs.** As governor, Terry will expand the violence intervention programs that support local efforts to interrupt and prevent violence and provide access to critical services that help to break this dangerous cycle. Under Governor Northam, the Department of Criminal Justice Services awarded \$2.45 million in federal Victim of Crime Act funding to support Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs (HVIPs), and during the 2020 legislative session, Governor Northam and the Democratic-controlled legislature provided several million dollars for community-based violence intervention programs grants to localities. Community-based violence intervention programs and HVIPs interrupt the cycle of violence by meeting victims of violence where they are and wrapping critical services around them either in the hospital or in their communities. These programs are critical and effective in improving outcomes for survivors of violence as well as reducing hospital costs,

recidivism and incarceration rates.⁷ Terry will expand these programs and ensure they receive permanent funding.

- **Partner with stakeholders to engage with Virginians and raise awareness about gun violence.** More Virginians die each year from gun violence than motor vehicle crashes and gun violence is one of the leading causes of unnatural death.⁸ When motor vehicle injuries and fatalities increase, Virginia takes aggressive action, passing laws to promote vehicle safety, and educating the public about wearing seatbelts, obeying speed limits, and engaging in safe driving practices. Unfortunately, when it comes to gun violence, our response as a Commonwealth has fallen woefully short due to partisan politics. Preventing gun violence and saving lives should not be a partisan issue. We must partner with healthcare professionals, educators and other stakeholders to discuss firearm safety and the potential dangers of having a firearm in the home, especially if it is not safely stored. As Virginia's 72nd Governor, Terry worked with diverse stakeholders to educate the public on the importance of safely storing medications, especially opioids, and firearms should be no different. Terry will work with these stakeholders to make conversations about firearm safety normal practice. This includes conversations about Family Fire, the injury or death of a loved one from a firearm in the home that is not safely stored. By lifting up and telling the stories of average gun owners across Virginia who safely store their firearms, and could not imagine doing otherwise, we can reframe what it is to be a responsible gun owner committed to ending Family Fire in their homes.

⁷ "Intervention Strategies." Giffords, Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 30 Nov. 2020, giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/other-laws-policies/intervention-strategies/.

⁸ Hobron and Yerkes.