Firearm Purchaser Licensing

Firearm purchaser licensing laws (sometimes referred to as permit-to-purchase) require an individual to obtain a license before purchasing a firearm. These laws generally require a prospective purchaser to apply to state or local law enforcement, undergo a comprehensive background check that often includes fingerprints, complete a firearms safety course, and wait for the application to be approved before acquiring a firearm.

Key Takeaways

- Firearm purchaser licensing laws close private sale and "default proceed" loopholes, ensuring that background checks are conducted on anyone seeking to obtain a firearm.

- Firearm purchaser licensing laws enhance universal background checks by providing state and local officials more time to check an applicant's history and cross-check federal information with local records.

- The additional components of these laws play a vital role in preventing people with a history of violence, those at risk of interpersonal violence or suicide, and traffickers from obtaining firearms.

- Built-in waiting periods help reduce the likelihood that individuals in crisis can immediately gain access to firearms.

Recommendations

- ☑ Enhanced background checks

- ☑ An application process that includes fingerprinting

- ☑ In-person component of application process

- ☑ Proof of firearms safety training

- ☑ Built-in waiting periods

Learn more about Firearm Purchaser Licensing laws on our website

Research Highlights

Research consistently shows that firearm purchaser licensing laws significantly reduce gun violence. They are among the most effective policies at reducing both firearm homicides and suicides.

Connecticut firearm licensing law associated with fewer firearm deaths: Connecticut's 1995 handgun licensing law was associated with a 28% reduction in the state's firearm homicide rate and a 33% reduction in the state's firearm suicide rate from 1996 to 2017.[1]

Repeal of Missouri's firearm licensing law associated with more firearm deaths: The repeal of this law was associated with an increase in rates of firearm homicides by 47% and firearm suicide rates by 23% from 2007 to 2016.

Reduction in urban gun violence: Firearm licensing laws were associated with an 11% reduction in firearm homicides in urban counties from 1984-2015.[2]

Lower rates of mass shootings in states with strong licensing laws: States with strong handgun licensing laws were associated with 56% fewer mass shooting incidents and 67 percent fewer mass shooting victims.[3]
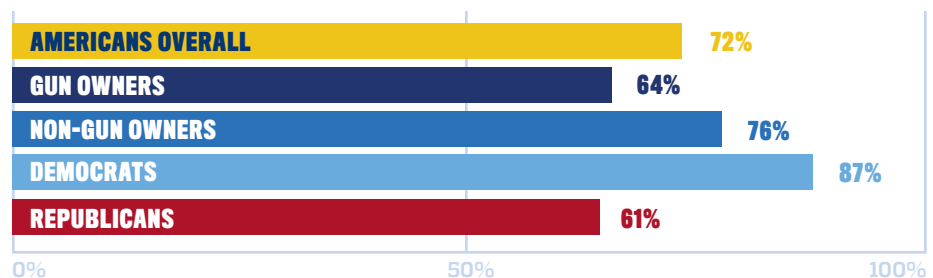
Firearm Purchaser Licensing protects law enforcement: Firearm purchaser licensing laws were associated with a 28% lower rate of shootings by police.[4]

Reduction in gun diversion: Firearm purchaser licensing laws are also associated with significantly lower rates of firearms being diverted for criminal use shortly after retail sale.[5]

Public Polling

Nationally, adults overwhelmingly support firearm purchaser licensing laws regardless of gun ownership or political party affiliation.[6]

72% of Americans support requiring a person to obtain a license from a local law enforcement agency before buying a gun.

Group	Support
AMERICANS OVERALL	72%
GUN OWNERS	64%
NON-GUN OWNERS	76%
DEMOCRATS	87%
REPUBLICANS	61%

Endnotes

1 McCourt A, et al. (2020). Purchaser licensing, point-of-sale background check laws, and firearm homicide and suicide in 4 US states, 1985-2017. *American Journal of Public Health.*

2 Crifasi CK, et al. (2018). Correction to: Association between firearm laws and homicide in urban counties. *Journal of Urban Health.*

3 Webster DW, et al. (2020). Evidence concerning the regulation of firearms design, sale, and carrying on fatal mass shootings in the United States. *Criminology & Public Policy.*

4 Crifasi CK, et al. (2023). The association between permit-to-purchase laws and shootings by police. *Injury epidemiology.*

5 Crifasi CK, et al. (2017). The initial impacts of Maryland's Firearm Safety Act of 2013 on the supply of crime handguns in Baltimore. *The Russel Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences.*

6 6. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. (2023). 2023 Survey Results: National Survey of Gun Policy.