



# Require Background Checks for All Gun Sales

March 15, 2018

Under current federal law, some individuals are prohibited from buying and possessing guns for reasons such as prior felony conviction, history of domestic abuse, or involuntary commitment for mental health treatment. Licensed gun dealers are required to conduct a background check for every gun sale in order to ensure that they are not selling guns to prohibited purchasers.

However, a substantial gap in the law allows unlicensed sellers—such as private individuals who sell guns online, at gun shows, or anywhere else—to sell guns without first conducting a background check. This means that prohibited purchasers can easily evade the law by buying guns through private transactions.

- A 2017 study found that 22 percent of gun owners who obtained their most recent gun within the past two years did so using a transaction that did not include a background check. The same study also found that 50 percent of gun owners who acquired their most recent gun through a private sale—rather than from a licensed gun dealer—within the past two years did so in a transaction that did not include a background check.<sup>1</sup>

Universal background checks are an effective way to help reduce gun violence and gun trafficking.

- When Connecticut implemented a law requiring individuals to obtain a permit and undergo a background check before buying a handgun, gun-related homicides in the state fell 40 percent. When Missouri repealed a similar law, its gun homicides rose 25 percent.<sup>2</sup>
- A 2009 study found that intrastate gun trafficking was 48 percent lower in states that required background checks for private handgun sales.<sup>3</sup>

So far, 19 states and the District of Columbia have acted to require background checks for all handgun sales.<sup>4</sup>

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## Endnotes

- 1 Matthew Miller, Lisa Hepburn, and Deborah Azrael, "Firearm Acquisition Without Background Checks: Results of a National Survey," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 166 (4) (2017): 233–239, available at <http://annals.org/aim/full-article/2595892/firearm-acquisition-without-background-checks-results-national-survey>.
- 2 Kara E. Rudolph and others, "Association Between Connecticut's Permit-to-Purchase Handgun Law and Homicides," *American Journal of Public Health* 105 (8) (2015): 49–54, available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4504296/>; Daniel Webster, Cassandra Kercher Crifasi, and Jon S. Vernick, "Erratum to: Effects of the Repeal of Missouri's Handgun Purchaser Licensing Law on Homicides," *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 91 (3) (2014): 598–601, available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4074329/>.
- 3 Daniel W. Webster, Jon S. Vernick, and Maria T. Bulzacchelli, "Effects of State-Level Firearm Seller Accountability Policies on Firearms Trafficking," *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 86 (4) (2009): 525–537, available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2704273/>.
- 4 Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "Universal Background Checks" (2017), available at <http://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/background-checks/universal-background-checks/>.