



**Statement for Virginia Kase, Chief Executive Officer
League of Women Voters of the United States**

**U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Hearing on Constitutional and Common-Sense Steps to Reduce Gun Violence**

March 23, 2021

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and members of the Judiciary Committee: we appreciate and commend you for holding this timely and critical hearing today to discuss ways to reduce gun violence across the nation. My name is Virginia Kase, and I am the CEO of the League of Women Voters of the United States (the “League”). The League is a century-seasoned federated organization with more than 500,000 members and supporters across the country who carry out our mission to empower voters and defend democracy. For decades, the League has worked with state officials and law enforcement to educate the public on the dangers of gun violence and to provide comprehensive recommendations towards gun reform.

The League of Women Voters of the United States appreciates the opportunity to share with the Senate Judiciary Committee our strong support for this hearing, and we hope this hearing will result in the common-sense legislative reform needed to reduce gun violence and increase public safety for our nation. This is what the American people want and are asking for, yet far too often, partisan politics gets in the way.

In just the last week, we have seen seven examples of horrific gun violence that led to the tragic loss of lives: last week’s mass shooting targeting Asian American women in Atlanta, Georgia, and this week’s grocery store shooting in Boulder, Colorado are just two examples. These recent attacks elevate the League’s demand for immediate comprehensive gun safety reform.

As comprehensive gun safety reform is reviewed and implemented, it must include: (1) requiring universal background checks, (2) closing the gun show loophole, (3) banning assault weapons and placing limits on high-capacity ammunition magazine size, (4) increasing penalties for straw purchases of guns, and (5) funding research and reporting on gun violence in America. Curbing gun violence is a critical matter of public safety and health. These measures are necessary to restore public confidence in our government’s ability to protect communities and vulnerable



populations, including children, the elderly, and people of color who are often targets of gun violence.

Providing Universal Background Checks

All firearm transfers should require background checks. In the 25 years since the *Brady Law* was first passed, more than 3 million illegal firearm transfers have been prevented. In 2015 alone, an average of 619 individuals per dayⁱ were deemed by law to be too dangerous to possess a gun and were blocked by this system. Background checks are conclusively effective and have saved countless lives. For these reasons, we encourage the Senate to pass S42, the *Background Check Expansion Act*, and take other bold steps to limit the crisis of gun violence in our country.

Closing Gun Show Loopholes

Only federally licensed firearms dealers are required to conduct background checks. However, forty percent of gun sales are completed without a background checkⁱⁱ, including private online sales, gun show sales, person-to-person sales, and other private transactions. Approximately ninety-seven percent of voters want Congress to expand background checks to all gun sales, including gun owners and vendors. Background check expansions must be enacted immediately to reduce gun violence in our communities.

Banning Assault Weapons and Limiting Magazine Size Limits

Congress must pass legislation to ban all military-style semi-automatic assault weapons like the one used to murder ten innocent people in Boulder on Monday. Two-thirds of registered voters nationwide support a ban on the sale of assault weapons.ⁱⁱⁱ These devices allow shooters to fire numerous rounds in rapid succession without having to stop and reload. Assault weaponry has been a central part of the mass killings in schools and public meeting places in the last ten years.

Furthermore, placing limits on magazine size is a common-sense solution that can reduce shootings that risk multiple lives. This limit should include magazines and other ammunition feeding devices that hold more than ten ammunition rounds.

Increasing Penalties for Straw Purchases of Guns

Buying a gun for someone who is prohibited by law from possessing one, or for someone who does not want their name associated with the transaction, is an illegal firearm “straw” purchase. Because straw purchases of guns are a federal crime, Congress should pass legislation to increase the penalties when individuals without criminal records purchase guns and pass them on to individuals who are not eligible to purchase a firearm, including felons and domestic abusers.

Funding Research and Reporting of Gun Violence

In 2018 and 2019, the nation witnessed more than 400 mass shootings, according to the Gun Violence Archive, a nonprofit research group that tracks shootings and their characteristics in the United States. These mass shootings included high-profile shootings in El Paso, Texas; Parkland,



Florida; and Dayton, Ohio. In the aftermath of each of these tragic instances, the League stood in solidarity with their communities and called for action.

The U.S. House of Representatives approved \$25 million in federal research funding to study gun violence. The *Gun Violence Prevention Research Act* of 2019 passed just days after the [seventh anniversary of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting](#) that killed 26 people, including 20 children. The funding was also included in the 2021 Fiscal Year package to continue the research and allocated an even split between the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. However, the bill did not gain traction in the Senate. Now is a critical opportunity for the Senate to show leadership by passing similar legislation and delivering the first gun safety law in more than two decades to the President's desk.

A mandate for reform

Across the country, local and state League of Women Voters chapters have held online and in-person meetings with their neighbors to discuss our nation's gun violence crisis. Our members have testified before state legislatures and met with community members to find common ground and determine policy solutions. Today, I am following their lead and asking the Senate to act on common-sense solutions to curb gun violence.

This Senate hearing presents an important first step, and the League demands that words and conversations transcend into action. The League implores the Senate to bring bipartisan legislation before the chamber that will require universal background checks, close the gun show loophole, ban assault weapons, place limits on high-capacity ammunition magazine size, increase penalties for straw purchases of guns, and fund necessary research and reporting on gun violence in America.

Comprehensive gun safety reform cannot wait. You have the opportunity now, to transform the future of this country by standing with courage and conviction on behalf of those whose lives have been lost, those who have been harmed, and the families of those no longer here. You can do what others have failed to do in the past – protect our fellow Americans from the terror and threat of gun violence and make the United States safer for all of us. Thank you.

ⁱ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2020/07/08/486292/dangerous-gaps-gun-laws-exposed-coronavirus-gun-sale-surge/>

ⁱⁱ <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/background-checks/universal-background-checks/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://thehill.com/homenews/news/457481-two-thirds-support-assault-weapons-ban-fox-news-poll>