Gun Safety Priorities for the Biden-Harris Administration

November 2020
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Dear President-elect Biden and members of the transition team,

The Biden-Harris administration will face unprecedented challenges to redress all of the damage done over the last four years. In addition to the new crises created by the Trump administration related to the COVID-19 pandemic that will warrant immediate attention, the next administration will take office during another significant public health crisis: gun violence.

Nearly 40,000 people are killed with guns in this country every year in incidents that involve homicides, suicides, and unintentional shootings, and another estimated 76,000 are grievously injured by gunfire. This means that every day, hundreds of American families and communities are torn apart by gun violence. Gun violence is a uniquely American problem: the gun death rate in this country is 11 times higher than other high-income nations. Because of the nexus between gun violence and domestic violence, women in America are 21 times more likely to be killed with a gun than women in other high-income countries.

The burden of this violence is not equally distributed across communities—Black Americans make up around 13% of the population, yet 58% of gun homicide victims. The summer of 2020 has been particularly devastating, with homicides spiking in many cities around the country as communities struggle with the intersecting challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic hardship, systemic racial injustice, and gun violence.

President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Harris have long been champions of gun safety, each with a demonstrated commitment to taking decisive action to address all facets of the gun violence epidemic. The Biden-Harris campaign released a strong platform on gun violence prevention that includes both legislative priorities and ideas for executive action. The administration will have a substantial opportunity to take meaningful action to address this public health crisis from day one.

Giffords and the Center for American Progress (CAP) have prepared the following memos to provide meaningful guidance on what actions should be considered as well as policy and legal analysis on how best to accomplish those priorities. These materials provide a roadmap for how best to accomplish more than three dozen ideas for executive action across the White House, Department of Justice, Department of Health and Human Services, and numerous other cabinet agencies. Giffords and CAP have also provided recommendations to help the Biden-Harris administration prioritize gun safety in their first proposed budget, and identify a diverse and qualified set of candidates to serve in the White House and federal agencies across the government.
As co-chairs of this effort, we bring a wealth of experience to this issue. Having worked at the community, city, state, and federal levels, we have developed gun violence prevention policies, signed legislation into law, treated gunshot patients in America’s trauma centers, grieved with families of gun violence victims, and run violence intervention programs. Some of us have even survived gun violence ourselves.

We believe gun safety is an urgent priority and have identified the following actions we believe should be considered during the first few months of the Biden-Harris administration. Most of these recommendations require the participation of law enforcement and strong relationships between police and the communities they serve; as such, reforming American policing will be a critical part of ensuring these actions are successful.

- **Create an interagency task force on gun violence prevention co-chaired by the White House chief of staff, the attorney general, and the secretary of Health and Human Services** to signal the importance of this issue and implement a comprehensive government approach to addressing it.

- **Nominate a strong director for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives** who will lend stability to the agency and prioritize the prevention of gun violence. The new director should immediately begin work on a comprehensive analysis of gun trafficking in the US and increase access to crime gun trace data to enable local law enforcement, policymakers, and research scholars to develop smart, targeted approaches to reduce gun violence.

- **Prioritize community violence prevention within the Department of Justice**, including by creating a Community Violence Intervention Task Force within the Office of Justice Programs to coordinate community-based violence prevention and intervention efforts across federal agencies, improve coordination of violence reduction initiatives with state and local stakeholders, conduct outreach to communities experiencing high rates of gun violence, and serve as a technical assistance resource for best practices. The Department of Justice should also immediately issue new guidance clarifying that funding available under the Project Safe Neighborhoods, Byrne JAG, and Victims of Crime Act grant programs should be used to support community-based violence intervention programs.

- **Commence a rulemaking process to ban “ghost guns”** to ensure that these untraceable firearms are not easily available, especially to prohibited purchasers.

The remaining recommendations are organized by agency and offer guidance as to prioritization to help ensure sufficient time to complete them.

Giffords and CAP stand ready to support the administration in all of its efforts to reduce gun violence. Our hope is that these materials serve as a helpful starting point as this critical work begins.
Former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords

Former Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe

Former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro

Obama Administration Senior Advisor Valerie Jarrett

President and CEO of the Center for American Progress Neera Tanden

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*Acting in individual capacity*