

Democrats introduce bill to expand background checks for firearms

Posted on Friday, Aug 16, 2019

Gov. Tony Evers joined Dem lawmakers and AG Josh Kaul to introduce a bill to expand background checks covering a vast majority of firearms purchases in the state.

But Assembly Majority Leader Jim Steineke, R-Kaukauna, said in a statement that it was “disingenuous” to suggest universal background checks “would have prevented the tragedies we’ve seen as a state and nation.” He instead called for expanding mental health services.

Citing the recent mass shootings in Dayton and El Paso that occurred just before the anniversary of Oak Creek Sikh temple shooting, Evers on Thursday slammed GOP lawmakers “that refuse to acknowledge gun violence is a problem” and called for “common sense” gun control legislation.

“It’s time to stop waiting for permission from the NRA. Enough is enough, folks,” he said during a Capitol news conference. “It’s time to be bipartisan and it’s time to lead.”

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

The proposal is one of two measures the gov backed. The other — “red-flag” laws that would allow family members or police officers to petition a court to temporarily remove firearms from a person deemed to present a danger to themselves or others — was not introduced Thursday. But Evers told reporters he planned to introduce the measure, which Kaul backs, “at some point in time.”

The bill introduced Thursday by co-authors Rep. Melissa Sargent, D-Madison, and Sen. LaTonya Johnson, D-Milwaukee, would close what several of the elected officials labeled as a “loophole” in current law that does not require a background

check for private firearm sales or transfers. Under current state and federal law, background checks are only required for sales through federally licensed firearm dealers.

Kaul criticized those laws as well as lawmakers he accused of propping them up, saying the state has “seen far too much inaction” on gun violence.

“Our kids deserve better than that. People deserve to feel safe going to school, they deserve to feel safe going to church or temple and they deserve to feel safe when they are in our communities,” he said.

Under the bill, firearm sales or transfers would have to be conducted through a federally licensed firearm dealer, which would use the background check framework that is already in place. The purchase of a long gun in Wisconsin through a firearms dealer requires a background check run through the FBI’s National Instant Criminal Background Check System while a handgun purchase requires a background check through the state Department of Justice’s Handgun Hotline.

Evers’ proposal has a number of exemptions, including sales of antiques, sales to a firearm dealer, to a member of the military or law enforcement or a transfer classified as a gift, bequest or inheritance.

Republican leaders have shown little interest in enacting gun control measures.

Speaking Thursday morning before the bill was released on WISN-AM, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, said both universal background checks and red-flag laws are measures “we know are not going to be effective.”

“I think there should be common-sense, middle-ground things that would improve the actual problem,” he said.

Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, didn’t comment on the proposals, with an aide referring to comments he made earlier this week that a “constituency who vote Republican” has concerns over universal background checks, because it raises the possibility people would have to register their guns. He also said there’s already a law on the books from the 1990s that is similar to a red flag law and could be tweaked.