

# NASW WI: Statement on the Acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse

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The Wisconsin Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers is greatly concerned about the community impact of the acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse on all five felony charges. We believe this acquittal could send a message in our state and across the country that it is appropriate for private citizens of all ages to take a gun to a protest, public event or other potentially volatile situation.

As social workers we understand the stages in human development and we are well aware of research that shows that the reasoning part of a brain is not fully formed until the mid-20's.<sup>1</sup> To allow a 17 year old to carry a military assault rifle into a volatile situation is a recipe for disaster. Furthermore, allowing any private individual to carry a loaded weapon into a public setting and act as a surrogate police officer is a serious mistake. Individuals can behave in harmful ways under stressful situations, and how having access to high-powered firearms in these situations can have deadly consequences, as we learned in this case.

On average, 621 Wisconsites die by guns every year. Gun deaths have increased 17% from 2010 to 2019. This represents an increase of 103 gun deaths over this period in Wisconsin. According to the Centers for Disease Control, in Wisconsin, the rate of gun suicide increased 6% and gun homicide increased 48% from 2010 to 2019, compared to a 13% increase and 26% increase nationwide, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of encouraging and allowing Wisconsin residents and visitors to our state to carry guns whenever they see fit, we need to pass laws that can reduce gun violence- including requiring background checks on all gun sales, passing an Extreme Risk Protection Order and passing legislation requiring a waiting period for the purchase of handguns.

The riots and violence in Kenosha where Kyle Rittenhouse killed two individuals and injured a third were ignited by the police shooting of Jacob Blake, an African-American father. To avoid similar tragedies, police officers need continuous training in de-escalation tactics and racial bias. There also needs to be much stronger accountability measures for law enforcement officers who violate police standards in injuring or killing members of our community. These changes could lead to more trust between the police and the diverse communities they serve.

1. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=141164708>
- 2 <https://everystat.org/#Wisconsin>