

Robyn Vining: Gun violence is a public health crisis

Posted on Wednesday, Apr 28, 2021

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

Gun violence is a public health crisis. Nearly 20,000 Americans were killed by gun violence in 2020 — more than any other year in decades. This dangerous trend continues in 2021. We have seen these tragedies at Mayfair Mall, the grocery store, places of worship, salons, nightclubs and bars, workplaces, and in our schools. Our children are growing up in this hyper-violent and traumatic society, where they face grief layered upon grief, and over the past few years, our children have been crying out to us through bullhorns for help. But as my colleague Senator Melissa Agard (D-Madison) put it, gun violence is not inevitable. We can hear the cries. We know how to respond.

It is beyond time to take action on this issue. Wisconsinites, regardless of political party, overwhelmingly support common sense gun violence prevention legislation such as universal background checks and Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO). As representatives of the people of Wisconsin, it is our duty to both listen to our constituents, and take action on their behalf.

The inaction from legislative leaders on this issue last session was unacceptable. When we are faced with a public health crisis, we do not sit back and wait — we act. This session, we must pass universal background checks and Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) legislation in Wisconsin. Universal background checks and ERPO laws are proven to reduce domestic violence by firearm, firearm suicide, and other deadly gun violence actions, including mass shootings. Extreme risk laws offer families and law enforcement officers a formal legal process to temporarily reduce an individual's access to firearms if they pose a danger to themselves or others. We can honor our Wisconsin heritage of outdoor sportsmanship, protect human life, and preserve constitutional rights surrounding gun ownership with gun violence prevention legislation.

>> 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.](#)

Governor Evers is providing the Legislature with an opportunity to make life saving action. Staring at hyper-partisan gridlock blocking progress in Madison, the Governor has offered us another solution: his budget proposal. Right now, provisions for universal background checks, as well as ERPO legislation, are included in the state budget. Since Republicans control the final version of the budget that receives a vote, they hold in their hands the power to pass these provisions now within the budget. It is possible the Republicans will remove these provisions from the budget, and if they do, my colleagues and I are ready to reintroduce it as standalone bills.

I will not treat gun violence or mass shootings as inevitable. We know what to do to save lives. We have lived with grief layered upon grief, and now is the time to act. We can pass gun violence prevention legislation that will save lives and curb the ripple effects of trauma in our communities. We can do so while protecting life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and liberty and justice for all. The future of Wisconsin's children depends on the change we create right now. We have heard your voices, we know what we need to do, and we have the power to do it. Now let's get it done.

- Vining, D-Wauwatosa, represents the 14th Assembly District.