



# Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

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## 2025 State of the State Address

### Gov. Evers Announces New Efforts to Reduce Crime and Keep Kids, Families, and Communities Safe by Preventing Gun Violence

*Governor proposes comprehensive plan to address crime across Wisconsin while enacting commonsense measures to prevent gun violence to keep kids, families, and communities safe*

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers, tonight during his 2025 State of the State address, announced his upcoming 2025-27 Executive Budget will include a comprehensive plan to address crime, keep kids, families, and communities safe, and enact commonsense measures to prevent gun violence.

**Relevant excerpts from Gov. Evers' 2025 State of the State address are available below:**

*"... We have work to do. We can start with the basics—making sure our kids are safe at home, at school, and in our communities is an area where we have much room for improvement.*

*"Last week, I created our new Wisconsin Office of Violence Prevention. We're going to work across law enforcement agencies and local governments and with school districts, nonprofits, and firearm dealers to help keep our kids, families, and communities safe. I also announced my budget will include sustainable, ongoing funding to make the Wisconsin Office of Violence Prevention permanent so we can take a statewide approach to preventing crime and violence across our state.*

*"I will, again, be proposing significant investments in our next state budget to expand access to mental and behavioral health services across our state. Those investments should receive bipartisan support. And we also have to make sure crime victims, survivors, and their families have the support they need to recover. I directed millions of dollars to keep Victims of Crime Act providers afloat when their federal funds were cut. Tonight, I'm announcing I'm investing \$66 million to support services for crime victims in our next state budget.*

*"But these actions alone cannot be our only effort to reduce crime and violence and keep our kids, families, and communities safe. Addressing gun violence must be part of our work, folks.*

*"In recent years, Wisconsin has seen about a 21 percent decrease in homicide, a nearly 30 percent decrease in burglary, and an almost 50 percent decrease in motor vehicle theft. Major categories of violent crime are going down statewide.*

*"And, yet, the rate of gun deaths in Wisconsin is trending in the opposite direction. According*

*to Everytown for Gun Safety, the rate of gun deaths increased in Wisconsin by 54 percent from 2014 to 2023, compared to a 34 percent increase nationwide over that same time period.*

*“Thirty-seven days ago, a shooting at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison took the lives of Erin and Rubi, a student and an educator, who woke up and went to school that morning and will never return home. Six others were injured, and countless lives will never be the same.*

*“Folks, Wisconsinites sent us here to see big problems and fix them. We cannot let common sense get lost in debates over whether basic policies could have prevented the most recent shooting, or the one before it, or the one before that. We aren’t here in Madison to quibble about the semantics of the last shooting; we are here to do everything we can to prevent the next one.*

*“So, we can do better than doing nothing. This Legislature must do better than doing nothing.*

*“This is Wisconsin. We hunt, we fish, we trap, and generations have grown up learning to appreciate our traditions. No one wants to change this proud part of our heritage. And we won’t. Because we do not have to choose between respecting the Second Amendment or keeping kids, schools, streets, and communities safe. We can do both. And the truth is this: the vast majority of Wisconsinites, including gun owners, agree.*

*“So, let’s start with two basic policies that we already know Wisconsinites support.*

*“We can take easy, simple steps to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people. Let’s ask everyone to play by the same set of rules. Let’s close the loophole so that everyone goes through a background check no matter what kind of firearm they are buying or where they are buying it.*

*“And the second thing we can do is pass a ‘red flag’ law to give law enforcement and loved ones the tools they need to get guns out of the home when someone is a dangerous risk to themselves or others.*

*“Just last month, we saw how crucial ‘red flag’ laws can be to prevent tragedy. Shortly after the shooting at Abundant Life, law enforcement discovered the shooter had potentially plotted with a man in another state who was allegedly planning his own mass shooting. Because he lives in a state with a ‘red flag’ law, law enforcement was able to get an emergency protective order requiring him to surrender his firearms before he could move forward with his plans. Their quick work almost certainly saved lives.*

*“Without ‘red flag’ laws, law enforcement in Wisconsin are often unable to intervene unless a crime has already been committed. At that point, sometimes it’s too late. We have to change that.*

*“So, let’s do what an overwhelming majority of Wisconsinites, including gun owners, believe we should: let’s give law enforcement and loved ones the tools they need by passing a ‘red flag’ law here in Wisconsin.*

*“And there are other easy steps we can take to keep our kids and our communities safe and keep guns off the streets. We can keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers. We can help make sure that guns in homes where there are kids or someone prohibited from possessing a firearm are locked away or have a trigger lock engaged. We can help make sure that firearms at retailers are secured when their business is unattended. We can help make sure that if a firearm is lost or stolen, law enforcement is immediately notified. We should be able to get this commonsense stuff done with bipartisan support, folks.*

*“A lot of our work is not just to prevent people from hurting others, but to make sure people are safe from hurting themselves. These next two policies are personal for me, as I know they are for folks who are here*

*and tuning in at home.*

*“Please know that if you or someone you know is struggling, help and hope are always available. You can call or text 9-8-8 or visit 988Lifeline.org to get free, confidential help anytime, 24/7.*

*“Just three years ago, as I delivered my State of the State address, State Representative Jonathan Brostoff sat right there in one of those seats. Jonathan had a heart of service. He was always working to make someone else’s life just a little bit better. And as fierce an advocate as Jonathan was, he was still always eager to learn about and understand others in order to bridge divides.*

*“At the end of last year, Jonathan died by suicide. We are so deeply saddened that he is no longer with us. Jonathan’s wife, Diana, and his parents, Phyllis and Alan, are here with us in the gallery tonight. Please stand and join me in recognizing them.*

*“For too many Wisconsinites, even if they did not know Jonathan, the story of losing him is their story, too. Kathy and I share that story. The families, friends, and coworkers of veterans, farmers, construction workers, and law enforcement officers and so many others share that story. Kids, classmates, parents, grandparents, loved ones, and friends in every corner of our state—they share that story. This heartache has become far too common.*

*“Wisconsin in 2022 reported 932 deaths by suicide, according to the Department of Health Services, nearly 60 percent of which involved a firearm. These are statistics we cannot change because those are souls we cannot bring back. But there is more we can do today to save lives tomorrow.*

*“If you talk to someone whose loved one died by suicide, many will tell you their loss was not a foregone conclusion. That maybe—just maybe—if the person they loved had just made it through one more dark night to see with certainty that the sun again would rise, things might have ended up differently. Tonight, I’m asking this Legislature to give the next family, and the next one, and the family after that, hope for that same opportunity.*

*“Studies show that the time between when someone decides to take their life and attempts to do so is often less than 24 hours—for about half, less than 10 minutes. The window for intervention is very short. Being able to purchase and possess a gun in minutes significantly increases the risk of firearm suicide—and firearm homicide, as well.*

*“A decade ago today, Wisconsin had a waiting period law, requiring time between when a person purchased a firearm and took possession of it. That policy was repealed. It’s time for Wisconsin to return to that commonsense policy. Tonight, I am announcing I will be asking the Legislature to restore the 48-hour waiting period in Wisconsin in our next state budget.*

*“I am also announcing tonight a new ‘Self-Assigned Firearm Exclusion’ program, or SAFE, to help reduce suicide by firearm. We can help make sure folks have a plan to keep themselves safe when they are in crisis. Our SAFE Program will allow Wisconsinites to temporarily—and voluntarily—register to prevent themselves from purchasing a firearm. Registering SAFE could make a real difference and even save someone’s life. Let’s get this done.*

*“Folks, the Legislature must start doing its part to take gun violence seriously in this state. People don’t expect us to be perfect in this building, but they do expect us to be pragmatic. People don’t expect us to acquiesce to each concept in every policy put before us, but they do expect us to at least have the courage to engage in a conversation. People don’t expect us to agree with each other 100 percent of the time, but they do expect us to have the guts to give reasonable policies a vote. Let’s do*

*better for Wisconsin than doing nothing. ...”*

## **GOV. EVERS’ PLAN TO REDUCE CRIME AND GUN VIOLENCE STATEWIDE**

The governor’s comprehensive plan to reduce and prevent crime and gun violence across Wisconsin comes in the wake of the deadly school shooting that occurred at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison on Dec. 16, 2024, which took the lives of two innocent individuals, injured six others, and forever affected and changed the lives of many. During his address the governor also declared 2025 the Year of the Kid and emphasized the need to make sure kids are safe at home, at school, and in their communities. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that, as of 2020, firearms have been the [leading cause of death for kids](#) in America—surpassing car accidents and cancer—with gun death rates in this age group increasing by 106 percent over the last 11 years.

While major categories of violent crime have decreased and the state saw about a 21 percent decrease in homicide, a nearly 30 percent decrease in burglary, and an almost 50 percent decrease in motor vehicle theft in recent years, the rate of gun deaths in Wisconsin is trending in the opposite direction. According to Everytown for Gun Safety, the rate of gun deaths increased in Wisconsin by 54 percent from 2014 to 2023, compared to a 34 percent increase nationwide over that same time period. Further, in every year since 2019, there have been more mass shootings than days in the year, according to data from the [Gun Violence Archive](#).

In 2022, there were more than [48,000 firearm-related deaths](#) in America, the second-highest year on record, with more than half of those deaths occurring by suicide. In Wisconsin, [nearly 60 percent](#) of all suicide deaths are firearm-related. Gun violence does not just affect only the largest cities and urban areas in Wisconsin. A recent analysis on [Gun Death in Wisconsin](#), firearm suicide rates have remained higher in rural Wisconsin compared to urban areas, and the majority of firearm deaths in rural areas of Wisconsin are suicide deaths.

As gun violence in particular continues to persist in communities across the state, especially in Wisconsin’s rural areas and communities, a commitment to comprehensive community violence and crime prevention as well as robust investments in mental and behavioral health services, crime victim services, coupled with commonsense gun safety reform, has never been more important.

### **Taking a comprehensive, statewide approach to reducing crime and preventing violence**

Gov. Evers last week [created](#) the state’s new Wisconsin Office of Violence Prevention and announced his budget will include sustainable, ongoing funding to make the office a permanent office in state government to reduce crime, prevent violence, and keep folks and families safe.

The Wisconsin Office of Violence Prevention will work with law enforcement agencies and local governments and with school districts, nonprofits, and firearm dealers to administer grants supporting violence and gun violence prevention efforts statewide.

As Gov. Evers signed [Executive Order #254](#) to create a statewide Wisconsin Office of Violence Prevention, he also announced he is directing \$10 million for the office to begin its work and administer grants supporting violence and gun violence prevention efforts statewide. The governor’s announcement builds upon his and the Evers Administration’s long-term efforts to address crime, prevent gun violence, and bolster efforts to keep kids, families, schools, and communities safe.

Among other critical responsibilities, the Wisconsin Office of Violence Prevention, as created by Gov. Evers, will work to:

- Connect the dots between state and local government agencies, including law enforcement agencies, to ensure a whole-of-government approach to prevent violence, including gun violence statewide;
- Support and provide technical assistance to local violence prevention and intervention efforts;
- Administer and award grants to school districts, firearm dealers, law enforcement agencies, non-profits, and government agencies to support violence reduction and prevention initiatives;
- Develop public education campaigns to promote safer communities; and
- Identify opportunities to improve statewide policies or laws.

Additionally, through the \$10 million investment Gov. Evers is directing, the Wisconsin Office of Violence Prevention will be able to begin its important work without waiting for the conclusion of the biennial budget process while also supporting grants aimed at reducing crime, preventing violence, including gun violence, and efforts to improve community safety across Wisconsin:

- Through Gov. Evers' directed investment in the Wisconsin Office of Violence Prevention, the office will administer grants to eligible entities, including school districts, law enforcement agencies, nonprofits, firearm dealers, and government agencies to support violence and gun violence reduction initiatives.
- Applicable entities will be able to apply to receive funding for eligible expenses and initiatives aimed at interrupting, reducing, and preventing violence and promoting community safety.
- Examples of eligible expenses for relevant entities will include but are not limited to:
  - Supporting multi-agency law enforcement investigations;
  - Using crime gun intelligence tools;
  - Implementing suicide prevention education to identify individuals in crisis, including at the point of sale for firearms;
  - Implementing or improving threat assessment training;
  - Promoting and administering safe storage and gun buyback programs;
  - Providing technical assistance and support to help design, implement, and/or staff evidence-based community policing, crime reduction initiatives, and gun violence crisis response teams;
  - Implementing or enhancing domestic violence prevention programs;
  - Implementing school-based programming, including suicide prevention and firearm safety training; and
  - Supporting mentoring and after-school programs and other efforts aimed at keeping kids out of trouble and out of harms way.

### **Investing in services for crime victims statewide**

Gov. Evers tonight also announced his 2025-27 Executive Budget will include a \$66 million investment to support services for crime victims statewide and help critical victim service providers stay afloat after seeing significant recent reductions in federal funding under the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA).

Many domestic violence shelters and resource centers depend on federal VOCA funding to provide critical victim services, including supporting rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, and child abuse response programs. VOCA funds are also used to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses for certain victims, including medical costs, counseling, and lost wages. For the next three years, federal VOCA funding has been cut to approximately a third of the funding the program received in the last five-year funding cycle. Lack of federal investment has left victim service providers scrambling in Wisconsin and across the United States.

Over the last six years, the governor has consistently worked to support and invest in dedicated advocates and organizations across Wisconsin that support crime victims and survivors of domestic abuse in the face

of federal funding cuts. In 2021, Gov. Evers directed \$20 million to support VOCA grant recipients facing declining federal funding and an increased need for services, which has enabled providers to stay afloat in recent years. The governor's 2025-27 Executive Budget investment will help fill the gap of lack of federal investment, ensuring crime victims receive the support they need across Wisconsin while helping treat trauma and prevent cycles of violence.

## **Reducing and preventing gun-related crime and violence across Wisconsin**

### ***Closing a loophole to prevent domestic abusers from possessing firearms***

[End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin](#) also showed that, in 2023, Wisconsin saw the second highest rates of domestic violence deaths in the state since they began tracking this data more than 20 years ago, 78 percent of which involved firearms. Gov. Evers' proposal seeks to prevent domestic abusers from being able to possess firearms by closing a loophole in Wisconsin state statutes.

Under federal law, anyone convicted of a "misdemeanor crime of domestic violence" is prohibited from possessing a firearm. "Misdemeanor crime of domestic violence" refers to a class of offenses that are: (a) a misdemeanor under federal, state, Tribal or local law; *and* (b) has—as an element—the use or attempted use of force or threatened use of a deadly weapon committed by individuals who have a certain domestic relationship with the victim.

Wisconsin's disorderly conduct statute—under which domestic abuse allegations are often charged—does not make the use or attempted use of physical force or the threatened use of a deadly weapon an element of the crime that must always be proven. Consequently, because of this loophole created between state and federal law, domestic abusers may still be able to possess firearms because their charges do not meet the federal requirements that otherwise bars individuals convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence from possessing a firearm. For example, the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 2022 unanimously held that the Department of Justice improperly revoked a concealed-carry license from a disorderly conduct misdemeanant as a disqualifying "misdemeanor crime of domestic violence" because the charge did not meet the federal threshold.

In June 2024, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a federal law that prohibits the possession of firearms by people subject to domestic violence restraining orders as consistent with the Second Amendment.

Gov. Evers is proposing to close the loophole created between federal law and Wisconsin state statutes aimed at preventing domestic abusers from being able to possess firearms. This is a critical step as Wisconsin continues to see high rates of domestic and intimate partner violence, including violence involving firearms. The governor proposes reorganizing the crime of disorderly conduct and the definition of domestic abuse to make it easier for law enforcement and prosecutors to determine whether a conviction qualifies as a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence for the purposes of firearm possession or a license to carry a concealed weapon.

### ***Promoting safe firearm storage to keep guns out of the hands of kids and dangerous people***

Gov. Evers' budget proposal will include several initiatives to promote and support the safe storage of firearms to prevent guns from getting into the hands of kids, people who may be at risk of harming themselves, individuals who are prohibited from possessing firearms, and individuals who are a threat to others.

According to the Giffords Law Center, about [380,000 firearms](#) are stolen nationwide annually; nearly half of the guns lost or stolen in the United States are never reported to law enforcement; and more than 23,000 stolen firearms recovered by police between 2010 and 2016 were recovered in connection with crimes, including more than 1,500 violent acts such as murder, kidnapping, and armed robbery.

The governor's safe storage proposals will include:

- Creating a sales tax and use exemption for sales of gun safes, trigger locks, and gun barrel locks, requiring an individual who owns one or more firearms to secure their firearms in a locked container, in a locked location, or with a trigger lock engaged if they reside with an individual who is prohibited from possessing a firearm;
- Updating current law to require that any firearm is stored in a locked container, in a locked location, or with a trigger lock engaged if children are present;
- Requiring commercial firearm sellers to provide buyers with a lockable container or trigger lock for the firearm;
- Requiring retail businesses that sell firearms to secure all firearms when the business is unattended using one of certain specified methods, including locked safes, cabinets or vaults, reinforced display cases, hardened steel rods or cables, a windowless room with a steel security door, or behind a steel roll-down or security gate; and
- Requiring a firearm owner to report within 24 hours to law enforcement when a firearm is missing or stolen, creating criminal penalties for noncompliance, and requiring commercial firearm sellers to provide written notice to the buyer of this requirement and penalty.

***Enacting “red flag” laws to give law enforcement and loved ones critical tools to help keep people safe***

Gov. Evers has been a strong supporter of passing “red flag” laws to help give law enforcement and loved ones the tools they need when someone is a dangerous risk to themselves or others. Following the deadly shooting at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison, Wisconsinites [recently saw](#) how an extreme risk protection injunction process, also known as a “red flag” law, can help prevent tragedy. In the aftermath of Abundant Life, law enforcement determined the shooter had allegedly plotted with a man in another state who was purportedly planning a separate act of mass violence. Because he lived in a state with a “red flag” law, law enforcement was able to act quickly to get an emergency protective order requiring him to surrender his firearms before he could move forward with his plans.

As of November 2024, 21 states and the District of Columbia have enacted “red flag” laws to keep folks safe, and according to a [Marquette Law School Poll](#), 81 percent of Wisconsin voters, including gun owners, support “red flag” laws.

Similar to the state's existing domestic violence injunction, Gov. Evers is proposing to create a similar injunction process, giving law enforcement and concerned loved ones the tools needed to get guns out of the home when someone is a dangerous risk to themselves or others. Without an extreme risk protection order process, law enforcement in Wisconsin is often unable to intervene unless a crime has already been committed.

Using this process, a court, after a hearing, could order an individual to refrain from possessing a firearm for up to one year if the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that the individual is substantially likely to harm himself or others by possessing a firearm.

***Making sure Wisconsinites in crisis can keep themselves SAFE***

Gov. Evers is also proposing to create a new program called the Self-Assigned Firearm Exclusion (SAFE) Program, which will help ensure folks who are in crisis have access to the resources needed to keep themselves and others safe. The SAFE Program will allow Wisconsinites to temporarily and voluntarily register to prevent themselves from purchasing a firearm. Similar programs have been enacted in multiple states across the U.S., including Washington, Virginia, Utah, and Delaware, and recent data has shown these self-exclusion programs to be successful.

Under Gov. Evers' SAFE Program proposal, individuals who feel they are a threat to themselves or others would be able to voluntarily notify the Wisconsin Department of Justice that they would like to be added to a database that would prohibit them from purchasing a firearm for a period of one year, five years, or 20 years, based on their preference.

***Requiring a waiting period between firearm purchases and possession***

Being able to purchase and possess a gun in minutes significantly increases the risk of firearm homicide and suicide by firearm. From 1976 to 2015, Wisconsin had a waiting period law that required time between when a person purchased a firearm and took possession of it. Wisconsin's 48-hour waiting period law was repealed a decade ago in 2015.

Gov. Evers believes it is time to restore the commonsense policy Wisconsin had for decades prior to its repeal and is announcing his 2025-27 Executive Budget will reinstate the 48-hour waiting period to purchase handguns.

***Requiring violent history checks for most firearm purchases***

Gov. Evers' budget proposal will close the gun show loophole and require violent history checks, also known as universal background checks, on nearly all gun purchases by prohibiting the transfer, with certain exceptions, of any firearm unless the transfer occurs through a federally licensed firearms dealer and involves a background check of the transferee, ensuring a violent history check before individuals purchase a gun.

According to the same [Marquette Law School Poll](#), 79 percent of Wisconsin voters, including gun owners, support mandatory background checks on people making gun purchases at gun shows or through private sales.

***Banning untraceable guns and certain firearm modification devices***

Untraceable guns, also known as "ghost guns," are firearms that are assembled by purchasing separate pieces or a kit to be fully functional firearms that do not have a serial number, making them untraceable and unregulated. Gov. Evers' 2025-27 Executive Budget will propose to effectively ban ghost guns in Wisconsin by criminalizing the manufacturing, transportation, sale, possession, and carrying of firearms that cannot be detected; the sale, posting, providing, or possession of plans to manufacture an undetectable firearm; and the possession of a frame or receiver of a firearm that is not marked with a serial number.

A "bump stock" is a firearm modification device that is used to replace a semiautomatic rifle's standard shoulder stock and allows a rifle to fire at nearly the rate of a fully automatic firearm without actually converting the weapon to a fully automatic firearm. The governor's budget will propose banning "bump stocks" by criminalizing the sale, importation, or possession of a device or part that is added post-manufacture to a semiautomatic firearm to accelerate its rate of fire.

An online version of this release is available [here](#).

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