

April 21, 2023



Unintentional shootings are just one of the many ways that guns kill, injure, and traumatize thousands of American children every year. Firearm suicide, domestic violence, community violence and mass shootings pose a significantly higher risk to kids in the United States than kids in other high-income countries. From 2015-2018, more than 35,000 children died from gunshot wounds before their 18th birthday. Tennessee is not immune from these tragedies – shootings impact children across our state every day. According to the Tennessee Department of Health, 55 children across the state died by homicides caused by firearms in 2020. In that same year, 38 children died by suicide with 19 of them committing suicide with a firearm. In 2022, Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital in Memphis treated 156 children for gunshot wounds and 7 of those children died. On March 27, 2023, 3 more innocent children and their 3 selfless caretakers were killed while going about their school day routine in Nashville. Equally disturbing is the profound fear shared by thousands of school children as they protested against gun violence at our state Capitol and in their communities during the days following the Nashville massacre. Simply doing nothing to address gun violence will lead to more children dying and exacerbate our state’s current mental health crisis. Every child deserves to live free from violence.

The Tennessee Public Health Association implores members of Tennessee’s General Assembly to come together now to enact common sense bipartisan legislation to address gun violence. We support Governor Lee’s proposed funding for additional school resource officers (SRO). We urge the General Assembly to approve funding for his request in the 2022-2023 state budget. While we applaud these measures, alone they are insufficient to adequately address the problem of gun violence. Tennessee needs a comprehensive solution to gun violence – one that includes Governor Lee’s school-based measures as well as common sense gun legislation as recommended below:

Universal Background Checks should be required for everyone buying a gun whether purchased from a licensed dealer or by private transfer. Background checks should include fingerprinting, access to state mental health records, restraining order data, FBI data and be finalized before completion of the gun sale.

Extreme Risk Protection Orders to enable temporary removal of firearms from someone who is reasonably believed to be a risk to themselves or others.

Firearm License or Permit required for everyone to own or purchase a gun, just as a license is required to drive a car. Issuance of a license/permit should be contingent upon completion of gun safety training.

Child Access Prevention and Safe Storage laws with penalties sufficient to protect children at home by ensuring parents or guardians are securing their guns to prevent underage access.

NOW is the time to enact common sense gun laws.

The Tennessee Public Health Association (TPHA) is a professional organization comprised of more than 1,100 individual and organizational members living and working within all 95 counties of Tennessee. Established in 1939, TPHA provides professional development and education to Tennessee’s public health workforce and advocates on their behalf for policies and legislation that promote the health and prosperity of all Tennessee.