

Written Testimony for Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Subcommittee

Hon. Brad Schneider, Illinois's Tenth Congressional District

For February 28, 2017

Mr. Chairman and distinguished colleagues of the Subcommittee, thank you this opportunity to speak before the Committee. I am here today to request full funding across all agencies within the Department of Justice for programs to reduce gun violence.

Gun violence in our country is an epidemic. Every year, more than 30,000 Americans die from gun violence. This makes Americans roughly 20 times more likely to be killed by a gun than citizens of other similarly developed countries.

Illinois's Tenth District borders Chicago, which has seen one of the worst increases in gun violence and gun deaths in the country. In some recent years, deaths from gun violence have even outpaced deaths from car accidents in Illinois according to the Violence Policy Center.

My constituents and I not only strongly support; we need commonsense policies to reduce gun violence in our communities. This means instituting universal background checks, addressing gun trafficking across state lines, and reinstating the ban on assault weapons, large capacity magazines, and silencers. We must finally investigate gun violence like the epidemic it is by allowing the Centers for Disease Control to allocate funding to firearms injury prevention.

A major component of safer gun laws must be a strong background check system to prevent people who should not have access to firearms – such as convicted felons, the dangerously mentally ill, and those with histories of domestic abuse – from purchasing these deadly weapons.

We must close loopholes that allow private sellers and unlicensed dealers to circumvent the federal background check system. A report from Americans for Responsible Solutions shows that correcting these loopholes saves lives: “in states with background checks on all handgun sales, 46% fewer women are killed by intimate partners, there are 48% fewer firearms suicides and 48% fewer law on-duty police officers are shot to death.”

While we work to bolster our background check process, we must also ensure our current system has the resources it needs to accurately and quickly check potential purchasers.

Currently, the United States relies on the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) to determine whether potential gun purchasers are eligible to buy. As required by the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1993, NICS is used by Federal Firearms Licensees (FFLs) before ringing up a sale. According to the FBI, more than 230 million such checks have been made, leading to more than 1.3 million denials to ineligible purchasers. I urge the Committee to prioritize the funding of NICS this Congress.

To ensure accuracy, background check systems must integrate data from a variety of disparate sources, including law enforcement, prosecutors, courts, and corrections.

That is why I urge the Committee to prioritize the funding of the National Criminal History Improvement Program (NCHIP). This program, within the Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics, works with states and localities to ensure criminal history records and related information are accessible for background checks. Through direct awards and technical assistance, the program works to improve the quality, timeliness, and immediate accessibility of this data.

I conclude my testimony by urging the Committee to safeguard the funding for programs critical to our nation's background check system as we work to pass sensible gun laws to keep our communities and families safe.