

Letter to the Editor: Saving children's lives by passing common-sense gun laws

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 10 March 2023 03:06



Dear Editor,

Over the past 70 years, we've done a great deal to make childhood less dangerous.

In the 1950s, children were protected from the last of the dreaded child-killing diseases with the development of the polio vaccine. In 1970, childhood poisonings were decreased when Congress required child resistant packaging on medications. By 1986, all 50 states had enacted laws requiring child car seats to protect children from what was then the number one killer of kids: automobile accidents. And in 1994, Congress passed the Child Safety Protection Act to

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require labels on toys that have parts small enough to pose a choking hazard.

We even have laws regulating the flammability of fabrics used in children's clothing and have set minimum ages at which youth may drink alcohol, smoke, drive, and vote. And we've done it all in order to keep our kids safe.

Yet Congress has failed to protect our nation's children by refusing to require firearms manufacturers to install child safety features. We've not even protected our kids from irresponsible gun owners who allow their children easy access to guns. Not surprisingly, by 2020 guns had become the leading cause of death for children in the U.S.

Guns are also the leading cause of death for kids in New Mexico, with an average of 33 children dying by firearms each year. Of New Mexico's child and youth gun deaths, the largest share (49%) are suicides. Fortunately, common-sense regulations can greatly reduce child gun deaths. This legislative session, lawmakers should pass a series of bills that demand responsible gun ownership while reducing the risks to children's lives.

One such bill requires individuals to safely store their firearms so that kids can't access them (HB 9), which would reduce accidental deaths and deter minors who may intend to self-harm or harm others. Another creates a 14-day waiting period to purchase a firearm (HB 100), which gives individuals time to reconsider before committing an impulsive act of gun violence or suicide. In fact, studies find that states with waiting periods have 51% fewer firearm suicides and 17% fewer murders. Across the U.S., only four states have higher suicide rates by guns than New Mexico.

Another critical bill is SB 116, which raises the minimum age from 18 to 21 to purchase or possess an automatic or semi-automatic firearm, with a few exceptions. Minimum age requirements make sense, because brain development continues until the age of 26, which means that youth under the age of 21 have a heightened risk of committing violence and suicide, and access to firearms only elevates these risks.

States that raised the minimum age to purchase firearms to 21 experienced a 9% decline in firearm suicides for 18- to 20-year-olds. Passing SB 116 would save children's lives with little to no impact to the majority of current firearm owners.

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We've seen enough tragic headlines here in New Mexico: a child accidentally kills a sibling, or a middle school student intentionally kills a classmate, both because they could access their parents' firearms. We cannot wait for the next child death, suicide or mass shooting to happen before we act. We must take action now by urging our legislators to pass HB 9, HB 100, and SB 116. This legislative session, let's put our children's lives first by passing common-sense gun laws.

Sincerely,

Marsha Garcia, Board Member of New Mexico Voices for Children

Divya Shiv, MPP, Research and Policy Analyst for New Mexico Voices for Children