

## BACKGROUND

In June 2020, the City of Alexandria became one of the first jurisdictions in Virginia to act under new authority granted by the General Assembly to promote gun safety and prevent gun violence by unanimously passing an ordinance prohibiting firearms and ammunition in city-owned facilities, parks, recreation centers, and areas requiring special event permits. Recent events, especially those involving minors, as well as local and national data related to gun ownership and gun related violence, suggest that additional actions are warranted to advance public safety.

According to Everytown for Gun Safety, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the gun violence crisis in America. Everytown estimates there were 3,906 additional firearm deaths and 9,278 additional firearm injuries nationwide in 2020 compared to 2019.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, firearm purchases soared in 2020 and 2021 to the highest levels in half a century, and more than 20% of total gun purchases were by first-time gun buyers. In Virginia, gun dealers saw record-breaking sales of firearms and ammunition during the pandemic,<sup>2</sup> and local data show the same alarming upward trend: In Alexandria in 2021, the city processed and granted nearly twice as many concealed-carry permit applications as in 2020. In 2022, to address this rise in gun ownership, Alexandria's City Clerk, in partnership with DCHS, began distributing free gun and trigger locks to applicants interested in those valuable safety tools.

The problem of gun violence is particularly dire for our children. In addition to meaningful gun safety laws and innovative curriculum and safety protocols, evidence strongly suggests that secure firearm storage is an essential component to any effective strategy aimed at keeping schools and students safe. An estimated 4.6 million American children live in households with at least one loaded, unlocked firearm.<sup>3</sup> Every year, nearly 350 children under the age of 18 unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else. Another 590 children die by gun suicide each year, most often using guns belonging to a family member.<sup>4</sup> On school grounds, 79% of active shooters are current students or recent graduates, and 78% of shooters under

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<sup>1</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety: COVID & Gun Violence. <https://www.everytown.org/issues/covid-gun-violence/>

<sup>2</sup> Bowes, Mark. "COVID-19 Contributing to Record-Breaking Spike in Virginia Gun Sales." Richmond Times Dispatch. 20 March, 2020. [https://richmond.com/news/virginia/covid-19-contributing-to-record-breaking-spike-in-virginia-gun-sales/article\\_ec9d4c09-81a5-5f87-96d8-1052bcc30e2f.html](https://richmond.com/news/virginia/covid-19-contributing-to-record-breaking-spike-in-virginia-gun-sales/article_ec9d4c09-81a5-5f87-96d8-1052bcc30e2f.html)

<sup>3</sup> Azrael D, Cohen J, Salhi C, Miller M. Firearm Storage in Gun-Ownning Households with Children: Results of a 2015 National Survey. *Journal of Urban Health*. 2018; 95(3): 295-304.

<sup>4</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety. "#NotAnAccident Index." <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/notanaccident/>

18 years of age obtained their guns from their own family home, relatives, or friends.<sup>5</sup>

Surveys show a majority of gun owners admit they do not securely store all their firearms.<sup>6</sup> Virginia law explicitly requires adults to store firearms where a child is unlikely to gain access.<sup>7</sup> School divisions in many states with similar laws now require parents/guardians to acknowledge they understand their legal obligation to store their firearms securely.<sup>8</sup>

Research shows that secure firearm storage is associated with up to an 85% reduction in the risk of self-inflicted and unintentional firearm injuries among children and teens.<sup>9</sup> It can also help prevent gun thefts.<sup>10</sup> On this front, we applaud the partnership between the Alexandria Clerk of Court's office and local Lock and Talk program, which now provides secure storage information and free gun locks to all concealed-carry permit applicants and holders. However, we must do more.

To ensure the secure storage of firearms and the reduction of gun violence becomes a lasting community value in our city, we propose the adoption of a proactive gun safety resolution by the Alexandria City Council and an invitation to schools throughout the city to join us in this resolution. This resolution will empower city staff to consider the following measures designed to promote gun safety:

- **We encourage schools located in Alexandria to review school curriculum, safety protocols, and professional development:** We encourage schools to consider work sessions before the 2022-2023 school year that reviews all curriculum, safety protocols, and professional development related to gun safety and suicide prevention. Additionally, the

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<sup>5</sup> New York City Police Department. "Active Shooters: Recommendation and Analysis for Risk Mitigation." 2016. <https://on.nyc.gov/2GIebl1>

<sup>6</sup> Benham, Barbara, and JH Bloomberg School of Public Health. "Survey: More Than Half of U.S. Gun Owners Do Not Safely Store Their Guns." Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, <https://www.jhsph.edu/news/news-releases/2018/survey-morethan-half-of-u-s-gun-owners-do-not-safely-store-their-guns.html>

<sup>7</sup> Va. Code Ann. § 18.2-56.2

<sup>8</sup> Alameda, Burbank, Glendale, Goleta, Los Angeles, Manhattan Beach, Monrovia, Monterey Peninsula, Poway, San Diego, and Santa Barbara Unified School Districts (CA); Bend-La Pine Schools and Lake Oswego School Board (OR); Creighton School District, Phoenix Union High School District, and Tucson Public Schools (AZ); Denver Public Schools (CO); Essex Westford School District (VT); Houston Independent School District (TX)

<sup>9</sup> Effects of Child-Access Prevention Laws on Unintentional Injuries and Deaths.

<https://www.rand.org/research/gunpolicy/analysis/child-access-prevention/unintentional-injuries.html>; Grossman DC, Mueller BA, Riedy C, et al. "Gun Storage Practices and Risk of Youth Suicide and Unintentional Injuries." *JAMA*. 2005; 293(6): 707-714.

<sup>10</sup> Parsons, Chelsea, and Eugenio Weigend Vargas. "Stolen Guns in America." Center for American Progress, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2017/07/25/436533/stolen-guns-america/>

superintendent and staff should prepare proposed updates to the curriculum, safety protocols, and professional development offerings that align with current best practices and Virginia code.

- **Provide parents/guardians with gun violence prevention resources:** Provide resources for parents/guardians on topics including the importance of securing all guns in their home(s) or vehicle(s); modeling responsible behavior around guns; asking about the presence of unsecured guns in other homes; recognizing the role of guns in suicide; seeking help for a child who could be a threat to themselves or others.<sup>11</sup> These resources could also be made available on school websites, similar to the website currently included on the [www.Alexandriava.gov](http://www.Alexandriava.gov) website and developed by neighboring Fairfax County.<sup>12</sup>
- **Raise awareness and promote understanding and use where applicable of Virginia’s “Red Flag” Law (Emergency Substantial Risk Order).** Virginia’s ESRO law prevents individuals who show signs of being a substantial risk to themselves or others from purchasing, possessing, or transporting any kind of firearm. ESRO provides necessary procedural safeguards to ensure that no firearm is removed without due process while ensuring that gun tragedies are avoided.
- **Secure parent/guardian acknowledgement of legal obligations and pledge to prevent child access:** Encourage schools prior to the 2022-23 school year to share information that explains the importance of secure gun storage and legal obligations to protect minors from accessing irresponsibly stored guns. These documents could require a parent/guardian signature acknowledging awareness of these legal obligations and pledging to commit to gun safety at home.
- **Work with local health care providers to engage patients and families on gun ownership and secure storage:** Encourage Alexandria health care providers—especially pediatricians and primary care physicians and nurses—to inquire of patients whether there is a gun in the home and, if so, if it is securely stored, as well as to distribute secure firearm storage educational information in their offices.

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<sup>11</sup> Be SMART: <https://besmartforkids.org/>

<sup>12</sup> FCPS Gun Violence Prevention Resources: <https://www.fcps.edu/resources/student-safety-and-wellness/gun-violence-prevention-resources>

- **Work with local gun violence prevention groups to further the city's commitment to gun safety:** Encourage city and school staff to partner with local gun violence prevention groups and our Public Health Advisory Commission to promote evidence-based gun safety policy and leadership through education and awareness campaigns (including public service announcements and press events), legislative measures, city- and school-sponsored resources, and other related efforts. Ensure programming is considerate of issues of equity and language needs so that all community members receive accessible information that is conscious of the disparate impacts of gun violence throughout our community and nationally.

## ***R E S O L U T I O N***

***WHEREAS***, public safety is an essential responsibility of local government, and prevention of threats to public safety is a wise and warranted approach toward ensuring a safe and healthy community environment for the enjoyment of all citizens; *and*

***WHEREAS***, an estimated 4.6 million American children live in households with at least one loaded, unlocked firearm; *and*

***WHEREAS***, studies show that parents often underestimate the extent to which their children know where their household guns are stored and the frequency with which children handle guns while unsupervised; *and*

***WHEREAS***, access to a gun is associated with a significant increase in the risk of suicide, and gun suicides claim the lives of nearly 24,000 Americans each year; *and*

***WHEREAS***, firearms are the leading cause of death for children and teens in the United States, and every year, 18,000 children and teens are shot and killed or wounded and approximately 3 million are exposed to gun violence; *and*

***WHEREAS***, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the gun violence crisis in America; *and*

**WHEREAS**, firearm purchases soared in 2020 and 2021 to their highest levels in half a century, with more than 20% of the total gun purchases by first-time gun owners; *and*

**WHEREAS**, the City of Alexandria wishes to take a proactive approach toward responsible gun ownership and safety, including secure firearm storage, in order to avoid circumstances of death, injury, and family and community trauma; *and*

**WHEREAS**, the Alexandria Public Health Advisory Commission unanimously adopted a Resolution on Gun Safety at its meeting on February 17, 2022, and shared it with Alexandria City Council on May 16, 2022; *and*

**Therefore**, be it resolved by the Alexandria City Council that they seek to work collaboratively with Alexandria schools, businesses, and advocacy organizations to promote and sponsor a gun safety initiative focused on responsible gun ownership and secure firearm storage by promoting and prioritizing communication efforts with parents and caregivers, health care providers, educators, business owners, and other interested groups. These efforts include but are not limited to education and awareness campaigns (including public service announcements and press events), legislative measures, and city- and school-sponsored resources.