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## WRJ Issues 2016: Gun Violence Prevention

### **History**

Gun violence has filled the news in recent weeks, sparking a national debate about the plethora of guns in our society and the ease with which people can obtain them. These are deep seated issues that impact our communities and require serious attention by our elected leaders. Yet, despite the public outcry that follows mass shootings like those in Orlando and Dallas, there has been little legislative activity to address the growing list of tragedies. Columbine, Sandy Hook, San Bernardino, Pulse – these names have become metaphors for the gun violence in America that seems out of control.

According to the [Coalition to Stop Gun Violence](#) each day eight young Americans under age 19 die from gun violence and over 30,000 Americans die each year from gun violence, with domestic violence victims making up a sizable portion of that statistic. The vast majority of Americans approve of common sense measures aimed at preventing gun violence. [A recent Pew study](#) showed that 85% of the public favors making gun show sales and private gun sales subject to background checks. Other studies have shown that nationally, even gun owners overwhelmingly [support criminal background checks](#) on firearm sales, including private sales.

There are some, however, who believe that gun violence prevention measures are unnecessary, ineffective, and contrary to the wording and spirit of the Second Amendment of the Constitution. Groups such as the National Rifle Association (NRA) argue that law-abiding citizens, like hunters and sports enthusiasts, will suffer under more restrictive laws, while criminals will be able to access guns no matter what restrictions are enacted.

The Brady Bill was enacted in 1994, mandating a five day waiting period and background check for gun purchases from licensed dealers. Gun dealers are now able to conduct an instant search through the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). According to the Department of Justice, the Brady Bill has prohibited 600,000 disqualified individuals from purchasing guns since its enactment. State legislation also has had beneficial results; one [recent study](#) revealed that in states that require background checks for all handgun sales, including guns offered online and at gun shows, there have been 52% fewer mass shootings.

### **Reform Movement Policy**

The Reform Movement has supported common sense regulations to limit and regulate the sale and use of firearms since the 1970s. Likewise, WRJ supported the Brady Bill in the 1990s and other efforts to limit the sale of guns. WRJ and others in the Reform Movement had a significant presence at the Million Mom March on Mother's Day 2000, calling for sensible gun regulations. Most recently, in June 2013, WRJ's Board of Directors adopted a [statement on Gun Violence Prevention](#), calling on its American sisterhoods to advocate for strong gun violence prevention legislation and to become knowledgeable advocates for such measures.

## What's at Stake in the Upcoming Election

Numerous bills, supported by the Reform Movement, were introduced in the current Congress that likely will be reintroduced in the next Congress or at the state level. Among them are:

The Fix Gun Checks Act (H.R. 3411/S. 2934). The Fix Gun Checks Act seeks to expand Brady background checks to all gun sales, not just those of licensed dealers. It also requires reporting of lost or stolen guns and cures other loopholes in existing legislation. As many as 40 percent of guns sold today in the U.S. are through unlicensed sellers, including at gun shows and online.

The Assault Weapons Ban (H.R. 4269). The Assault Weapons Ban, would prohibit the sale, transfer, production and importation of 157 of the most commonly-owned military-style assault weapons. Such guns have been used in recent mass shootings, including the Orlando attack. These weapons are designed to enable shooting large numbers of bullets quickly and efficiently without reloading. When an assault weapon or a high-capacity magazine is used in a shooting, the number of victims who are killed increases exponentially.

The Background Check Completion Act (H.R. 3051/ S. 2213). The Background Check Completion Act would prohibit a licensed gun dealer from selling a firearm to a person before their background check is complete. Although 95% of instant criminal background checks are completed within two hours, additional time to complete background checks is sometimes needed. When firearm dealers are allowed to bypass background checks, they too often end up selling to people who otherwise would be prohibited purchasers.

Protecting Domestic Violence and Stalking Victims Act (S. 1520) and Zero Tolerance for Domestic Abusers Act (H.R. 3130). Victims of domestic abuse are particularly susceptible to gun violence. These bills would extend provisions that bar convicted domestic abusers from possessing firearms to also bar convicted “dating partners” and stalkers from possessing firearms.

Whether or not elected officials will seriously address gun violence or adopt sensible gun regulations at the state or federal level remains to be seen. Indeed, the stakes are high and YOUR vote will make a difference on this important issue. Find out the candidates' views. Consider Reform Jewish values. Think about what's important to you and what you believe. And then vote wisely.

**Your vote matters! Register. Listen. Educate. Vote.**

You can find out more about WRJ policy on this and other advocacy issues at the WRJ website [Social Justice page](#). For more information about this issue and related Reform Movement positions, go to the Religious Action Center's [Gun Violence Prevention](#) page. NFTY has also taken a lead on this issue and has [resources about gun violence](#) available.

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