

TEXAS
GUN SENSE

PRESENTS

2023 TEXAS LEGISLATURE

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

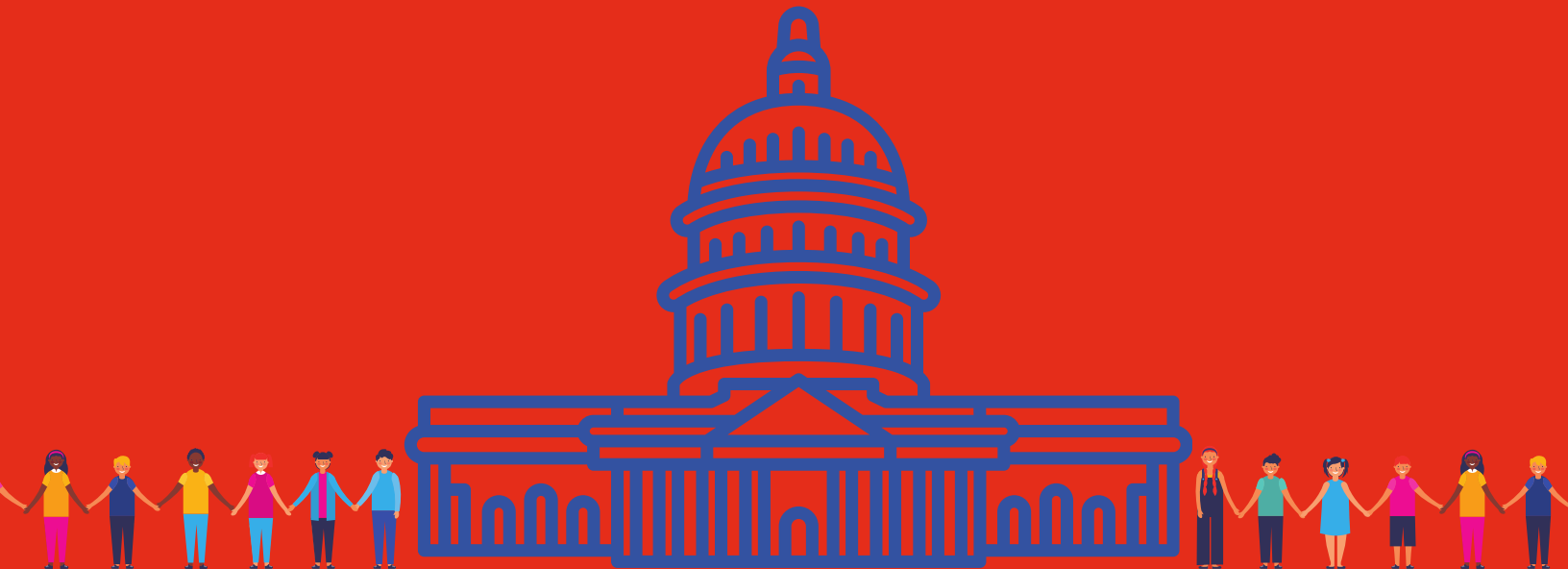


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Texas Gun Sense

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About the Texas Legislature

The Texas Legislature consists of 31 Senate members and 150 House members, led by the Speaker of the House, the Lieutenant Governor, and the Governor. The Legislature convenes for 140 days every 2 years with 30-day special sessions that can only be called by the Governor.

The bill filing deadline has passed this session; bills are now being referred to different committees, after which a hearing will be called to discuss the bill and get input from the public. For a bill to pass, it has to go through both chambers before reaching the Governor's desk.

- The House Select Committee on Community Safety will hear most gun-related bills this session.
- The Youth Health and Safety Select Committee is hearing several school safety bills.
- In the Senate, gun-related legislation is often referred to the State Affairs Committee.

Contacting Your Representatives



Your lawmakers work for you and they need to hear from their constituents on the importance of gun safety. Look up who represents you and how to reach them.

Things to Remember:

- Calling and emailing legislators are both effective ways to make your voice heard. You can also request in-person meetings with your representatives to establish relationships and have longer discussions.
 - Look up the contact information for legislative offices.
 - View a map of the Capitol and parking information.
- In all communications with legislative offices, include your name, contact information, and full address.
 - If you fail to include this information, it is unlikely that your comment(s) will be logged.
- Reference specific bills and state clearly which bills you support or oppose.

Give Public Testimony



During committee hearings on bills, the public has the opportunity to register a position on a bill and provide testimony in support or opposition to a piece of legislation. This is one of the most vital opportunities to have your voice heard on bills that have a chance of passage.

Depending on the hearing, you will get 1-3 minutes to speak and will need to prepare accordingly. Committee hearings are often posted 48 hours in advance. View the House Committees [schedule](#) and the Senate Committees [schedule](#) for more information.

Sign up to support or oppose a bill.

Prepare notes or a fully written speech on what you will say.

If you can, bring enough copies of your testimony to hand out to each person on the committee.

Introduce yourself and provide your clear position on the bill.

Establish a personal connection to the subject matter and let the committee members know why the issue matters to you.

Back up your position with data and evidence.

Ask them to take action by: amending the bill, passing the bill, or voting against the bill.

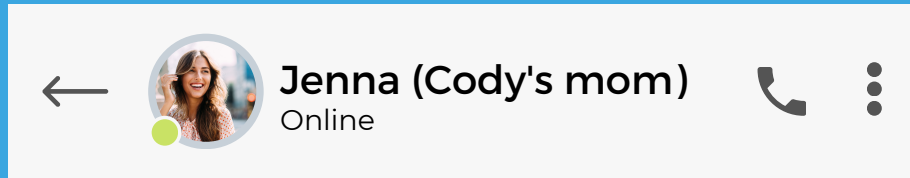
Relational Organizing

Talking to the people in your life about the need for gun safety reform is one of the most important things you can do. Change happens at every level, and personal conversations are an important part of the culture change we need to see.

Say This	Not That	Here's Why
Gun reform / gun safety / gun violence prevention	Gun control	This reframing centers the focus on saving lives rather than restricting gun ownership.
Background checks on all gun sales	Universal background checks	"Universal" can be associated with mandates. Instead, this wording specifies that private sales and transfers would require the same background check a federally-licensed dealer runs.
Raise the age of purchase for semi-automatic rifles	Ban semi-automatic rifles	In the current political climate in Texas, it is extremely unlikely that we could pass a ban. However, there is a chance that we can make progress towards raising the age to 21 to purchase semi-automatic rifles.
Semi-automatic rifle	Assault rifle	This is the term recognized by the ATF and it is how this type of weapon is categorized in most legislation.
The majority of Texans...	All Texans / Every Texan...	The majority of Texans support the implementation of: red flag laws, background checks on all gun sales, and raising the age to purchase semi-automatic rifles. When you claim that <i>every</i> Texan supports these measures, your argument loses credibility.
Gun extremists	Gun nuts	Gun extremists are a small, vocal minority and do not represent the bulk of gun owners. We want to call them out as dangerous to our public safety rather than poke fun.
I am anti-gun violence	I am anti-gun	We support common sense, evidence-based policies to prevent gun violence while respecting responsible gun ownership.
Died by suicide with a firearm	Committed suicide with a firearm	Neutral language helps to decrease the stigma associated with suicide. The word "commit" implies that suicide is a criminal or immoral act.
Lives taken/stolen by gun violence	Lost to gun violence	Talking about a life "lost" to gun violence removes responsibility from the shooter.

Safe Gun Storage

A crucial aspect of relational organizing within the gun violence prevention space is having conversations about the safe storage of firearms.



Hi! Before I bring Sam over, I wanted to ask -- if you own guns, are they stored securely?

8.30 ✓

Hey, that's a great question! We do own guns but they are stored unloaded and locked in a safe. We're excited to have Sam!

8.30

Helpful talking points

- Safe storage = storing guns unloaded in a safe or locked container, with ammunition stored elsewhere.
- Safe gun storage prevents unintentional shootings, suicides, and other gun tragedies.
- When bringing children to other people's homes, simply ask, text, or email "If you own guns, are they stored securely?" **This one question could save someone's life.**

Debunking Gun Myths

1 *Myth: More guns make us safer, so if we want to reduce gun deaths, we should arm more people.*

- If this were true, we would be the safest country in the world. Instead, we have a gun homicide rate that is 25 times higher than peer nations. Research also shows that states with permitless carry laws saw a 22% increase in gun homicides for the three years following the law's passage.

2 *Myth: Gun violence is inevitable/not preventable.*

- States that pass stronger gun laws have shown a reduction in gun violence. For example, states that require a background check on all gun sales have a 10% lower homicide rate.
- Decades of underfunding research on gun safety prevented law enforcement from cracking down on gun traffickers and tracing guns used in crimes to their buyers.

3 *Myth: The second amendment means that any restrictions on gun ownership are unconstitutional.*

- Common-sense policies and responsible gun ownership can go hand-in-hand.
- All constitutional rights have reasonable limitations to protect the public. For example:
 - Freedom of speech is prohibited by the incitement of lawless action.
 - Freedom of the press is prohibited by defamation.
 - Citizens have to register to exercise their right to vote.

4 *Myth: Arming teachers will make our schools safer.*

- Educators do not support expanding guns in schools. In a survey by the Texas American Federation of Teachers, 77% of K-12 teachers reported a wish not to be armed.

Debunking Gun Myths

5 *Myth: Gun violence is caused by mental illness.*

- Most often, those who suffer from mental illness are victims rather than perpetrators of violence.
- Expanding mental health services is one aspect of the many solutions we need in place to prevent gun violence, including laws that keep guns out of the hands of those with documented violent histories.

6 *Myth: Gun safety reform could never happen in Texas.*

- Texans support safe gun laws. For example, 86% of Texas voters support requiring background checks on all gun sales.
- Although guns have played a prominent role in defining Texas culture, we have had common sense gun regulations for most of our state's history.
- Texas has a long history of responsible gun ownership. In fact, gun regulations in Texas even predate statehood and independence.

7 *Myth: Most gun violence is gang-related and happens in urban areas like Chicago.*

- Historic disinvestment in communities of color have led to cycles of poverty and an increase in risk of gun violence. Community violence often occurs in under-resourced city neighborhoods and disproportionately impacts Black and Hispanic/Latino communities — specifically young Black and Hispanic/Latino men.
- According to the Chicago Police Department, 60% of crime guns used in Chicago came from other states. ATF tracing data shows that these guns were mostly purchased from surrounding states with weaker gun laws.

8 *Myth: If 18 year-olds can vote, they should be able to buy semi-automatic rifles.*

- You have to be 21 years-old to purchase alcohol, cigarettes, and handguns, but only 18 to purchase a deadly weapon like an AR-15.
- We cannot ignore the fact that many mass shootings are perpetrated by people under the age of 21. At a minimum, the age requirement to purchase a semi-automatic rifle should be raised to 21 to match Texas' handgun laws. This measure could have prevented the horrific Robb Elementary shooting in Uvalde.

Stay Engaged!



Print these materials to help you talk to your friends and family about gun violence. Every conversation is a ripple in the turning tide.



Create an account on the Texas Legislature Online to stay engaged with gun-related bills at the Capitol.



Follow us on social media and make sure you're signed up for our newsletter where we will distribute actions you can take.



Sign to volunteer with us and join us at the Capitol advocating for gun safety reform.

"For 10 years, we have advocated to prevent gun violence in Texas. Today, you can join us by taking action and using your voice to build a future free from gun violence for our communities - together."

-Nicole Golden, Executive Director