

SUMMER 2016 #FIGHT4AFUTURE WEEK OF ACTION



Rising Up To #DisarmHate In All Communities

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A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Hello!

Thank you so much for your interest in the Generation Progress #Fight4AFuture Network, and the ongoing movement for criminal justice reform and gun violence prevention.

August 15th marks the start of the #Fight4AFuture Youth Week of Action. While members of Congress are in their home districts for summer recess, we are mobilizing young people from across the country to take action in the states. As a valuable constituent, your elected representative needs to hear from you about why these issues must be a priority.

We encourage YOU—young leaders, organizers, and activists—to make your voice heard by meeting with elected officials and law enforcement, engaging on social media, and holding events in your community. Your passion and energy for the movement is critical, and together, we can make noise and make change.

Of course, this year has not been easy. We have seen justice go unserved time and again in a number of tragic mass shootings, police-involved shootings, and individual cases of daily gun violence. We have seen young Americans killed or injured because of systematic violence and the easy availability of guns in our country. We have seen political leaders incite violence and normalize hate speech, widening divisions of trust between communities and law enforcement. But we have also seen the tireless efforts of young people coming together to say: **enough is enough.**

That's why this year, more than ever, we need to ensure Congress hears our voices. We need to finally turn the tide on regressive criminal justice policies and senseless gun policies that disproportionately impact young people, and young people of color especially.

We need laws that control who has access to firearms and what types of weapons individuals have access to. We need to address the root causes of violence in our communities, and instead of perpetuating injustice in our criminal justice system, we need to reinvest in our communities.

We hope this toolkit will provide a comprehensive guide on organizing, taking action, and making your voice heard by both elected officials and the media. We certainly can't do this alone — we need your help. Our generation knows we can — and must — do so much better.

As always, feel free to reach out to our team at hello@genprogress.org with any questions, concerns, or ideas. We look forward to working with you, and making progress on criminal justice reform and gun violence prevention!

Sincerely,

Maggie Thompson
Executive Director, Generation Progress

THE WHO, WHAT, AND WHY OF GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Gun violence has no easy cure, but with the help of targeted policies and bills, America may one day see an end to [one of its most fatal epidemics](#). While some politicians have steered away from these policies in favor of less polarizing issues, it is clear now more than ever that gun violence doesn't just affect one community, it affects the safety of our entire nation. With [more than 33,000 people fatally shot each year](#), we must enact meaningful gun violence prevention solutions to create a better, safer future for our country.

To help you work toward that future, Generation Progress has created an overview of the current federal gun violence prevention climate. From the conditions that lead to gun ownership to a quick overview of the most recent gun violence prevention bills and how they shape the who and what of guns — that is, who can buy guns and what kinds of guns can people buy — we hope to provide you with the information you need to get involved in the fight against gun violence.

WHY: Conditions That Lead To Gun Ownership

Guns are often spoken about in the context of hunting and southern heritage. However, this is no longer the main reason why people own firearms. The [majority of gun owners purchase guns for protection](#), not for hunting or for recreational use. Further, this protective justification is cyclical: the perception of widespread gun ownership compels more individuals to arm themselves for self-protection. If all of your neighbors own guns, you may naturally feel as though you have to own a gun as well.

Additionally, the majority of gun violence incidents occur in large cities, where low-income residents experience a lack of economic opportunities and community resources. The lack of alternatives in these communities often forces its members to arm themselves because they feel insecure and unprotected in their own neighborhoods. Therefore, while easy access to firearms is a major cause of gun violence, the root cause of it is the lack of economic and educational opportunities in these communities. In order to address these systemic inequalities, gun violence prevention advocates must not only push for legislation, but also for community reinvestment initiatives.

FAST FACTS



Two-thirds of gun deaths are [suicides](#).



The [total annual cost of gun violence in America](#) is \$229 billion.



Gun violence is the [leading cause of death for black Americans ages 15-19](#).



Victims of domestic violence are [five times more likely to be killed by their abuser if their abuser owns a firearm](#).

WHO: How Would Proposed Gun Violence Prevention Legislation Change Who Can Buy Firearms?

WHO CAN BUY NOW

Under current federal law, licensed gun sellers must conduct a basic background check on all potential buyers prior to a sale. Unfortunately, private gun sellers are not held to the same restriction. While some states have passed more comprehensive gun laws, others have not, which leaves many dangerous loopholes open for buyers to exploit.

Here are just a few examples of who can buy a gun today:

- Individuals who cannot pass a basic background check [can buy a firearm from a private gun seller](#).
- Individuals who are [prohibited from flying commercial flights](#) and are on the federal government's "No Fly List."
- Individuals who go to buy a gun from a licensed seller but whose background checks are not cleared within three days may return to the shop and then purchase a firearm, regardless of the pending background check.
- Individuals [convicted of a misdemeanor](#) hate crime.
- Convicted [stalkers and domestic violence abusers](#) in dating-relationships.

WHO COULD BUY AFTER

There are four major bills in Congress right now that would prevent guns from falling into the wrong hands.

Here is how these bills can change who can buy a firearm:

- [H.R. 1217, The Public Safety and Second Amendment Rights Protection Act](#). Would require all gun sellers (licensed and unlicensed) to conduct a background check. Restricts easy access to guns if individual cannot pass a background check.
- [H.R. 1076, Denying Firearms and Explosives to Dangerous Terrorists Act](#). Would prohibit individuals on the "No Fly List" from purchasing a firearm.
- [H.R. 3051, The Background Check Completion Act](#). Would prohibit individuals from purchasing a firearm before receiving official clearance from their background check.
- [H.R. 4603, Hate Crimes Prevention Act](#). Would prohibit individuals convicted of misdemeanor hate crimes from purchasing firearms.
- There is no current federal legislation addressing the loophole which allows convicted stalkers and domestic violence abusers in dating relationships to purchase firearms.

Implications for Communities of Color

It should be noted that while these bills will undoubtedly change the overall landscape of gun ownership in America, communities of color stand to be the most affected. Therefore, it is important to consider the implications of proposed legislation on communities of color in particular.

Any expansion on background checks must take into account [the disproportionate rates of incarceration amongst black and Latino communities](#): one-third of black men in America [can expect to go to prison](#) in their lifetime. Given this stark reality, conversations about gun violence prevention must consider the way in which black and Latino communities will be particularly impacted by proposed legislation. As we seek to protect our communities, we must ensure we are not disproportionately denying people of color access to a gun due to a criminal justice system [that often criminalizes them at higher rates](#) than white counterparts.

Additionally, any bills seeking to prevent gun violence must ensure that their enforcement does not lead to racial profiling against people who are perceived as dangerous, based on factors such as skin color or religion.

WHAT: How Would Proposed Legislation Change What Firearms We Can Buy?

WHAT YOU CAN BUY NOW

The Federal Assault Weapons Ban, which banned the sale of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, expired in 2004.

In addition to handguns and rifles, these may be purchased by a civilian buyer:

- Assault weapons: [semi-automatic assault weapons](#) allow the user to shoot several rounds of ammunition in a very short amount of time.
- High-capacity magazines: these magazines allow multiple rounds of ammunition to be shot without needing to reload.

WHAT YOU COULD BUY AFTER

While there is no current federal legislation on this issue, there have been discussions in the past of renewing the Federal Assault Weapons Ban.

Here is how that legislation could change what types of firearms are available to the public:

- Reinstating the Federal Assault Weapons Ban would restrict the public's access to assault weapons.
- Banning the sale of high-capacity magazines — which eight states and the District of Columbia currently do — would restrict the availability of dangerous weapons.

Common-sense gun laws work. States that have passed laws that require background checks on all gun sales, private and public, [saw dramatic decreases in the number of deaths](#) caused by firearms. With this in mind, we must remind our federal and local governments that taking these necessary steps towards common-sense gun regulations will benefit every community in America, including their own. In addition to gun legislation, government officials must work hand-in-hand with their own communities to develop community-based initiatives that provide resources to high-risk, low-income communities. Reducing gun violence in America will only be possible when lawmakers and community leaders come together to make gun violence prevention a priority.

MILLENNIALS TACKLE CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Millennials are coming of age in a time of great uncertainty. Still suffering from the economic consequences of coming of working age during the Great Recession, Millennials simultaneously face the struggles of the soaring cost of higher education, rampant gun violence, and a broken criminal justice system. Issues of criminal justice reform like mass incarceration, sentencing reform, recidivism and re-entry, community policing, and police brutality place a particularly heavy burden on young people. Research shows that young people of color are significantly more likely to be incarcerated than white youth. Additionally, young people are killed by police at higher rates than other age groups.

In an effort to identify Millennial-driven solutions to a broken criminal justice system, Generation Progress traveled to Columbia, S.C.; Baltimore, Md.; Phoenix, Ariz.; and Dallas, Texas. A diverse group of stakeholders—activists, organizers, policy experts, academics, advocates, law enforcement agents, elected officials, and entrepreneurs—were convened to engage in open, honest, and intentional conversations around criminal justice reform.

The recommendations listed below are a product of those conversations. We encourage you to take these recommendations to your local, state, and/or federal government officials. To read the full report, [visit our website](#).

10 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES AND A FAIRER CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM:

RACE AND PRIVILEGE



Communities should provide **safe spaces** for all youth to discuss and explore racism and white privilege.

LAW ENFORCEMENT REFORM AND ACCOUNTABILITY



Police departments and the court system as a whole should **reflect the community** that they represent.

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT



States, cities, and municipalities should dedicate more **resources to education**, especially in low-income school districts.



Police departments should **expand their training regimens** to include: bias training, de-escalation training, diversity training, and mental health competency.



States, cities, and municipalities should invest in **mentoring programs** at all levels to provide youth with successful role models.



Police departments should provide residents with **transparent processes for reporting** and challenging police misconduct.



States, cities, and municipalities should **remove barriers to re-entry** and give those convicted of crimes a better chance at obtaining employment.



Police departments should provide safe spaces for officers to **report wrongdoing** observed of other officers.



States, cities, and municipalities should **re-allocate policing funds** to community investment programs and initiatives that emphasize academic, economic, and social prosperity.



Police departments should implement **community policing initiatives** that encourage police officers to build relationships with community members and residents.

TAKE ACTION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Take action in your community by having a meeting or hosting an event. Let us know if you have any questions, and please make sure to register your events and meetings so that we can help amplify your work: genpr.gs/GVPEventRegistration

- 1. Meet with an elected official or their staff.** Meeting with an elected official or their staff is a great way to make your voice heard.
 - **Find your member of Congress.** [This website](#) will lead you to your member's website, where you can find their office closest to you.
 - **Schedule a meeting.** Call their district office line and ask when you can meet with the member of Congress or their staff.
 - **Meet with the member of Congress or their staff.** Come prepared. Bring the policy sheets in this toolkit to reference facts and statistics. Tell your story and why this issue matters to you. The more personal the meetings is, the better. In the meeting, make sure to make a direct ask of the member of Congress or their staff. Ask if they will support common-sense gun legislation.
 - **Follow up.** Follow up on the direct ask. Call their office. Make sure your voice continues to be heard.
 - **NOTE:** The above instructions can be applied to local or state-level meetings, as well.
- 2. Host a visibility event.** Visibility events are a great way to draw attention to your cause.
 - **Host a rally or protest outside of a member of Congress' office.** This is especially important if the Member of Congress has opposed common-sense gun legislation in the past. [Click here to download our #Fight4AFuture rally sign.](#)
 - **Host a sit-in.** Sit-in in solidarity with Rep. John Lewis of Georgia and members of Congress who sat-in in protest of Speaker Ryan's refusal to take action to prevent gun violence. Invite the local press, and get your friends and colleagues to help amplify on social media.
 - **Host a panel with local elected officials and activists.** This is a great way to educate the community about these issues. Invite all your friends and colleagues to attend. Take lots of pictures and send them to us so we can help amplify the event.
- 3. Attend an event in your area.**
 - To find an event hosted by your member of Congress, [click here](#).
 - To find an event hosted by a local gun violence prevention organization, [click here](#).

Five Minutes With Gun Violence Prevention Activist Caleb Webb On In-District Meetings

Caleb Webb is a young grassroots lobbyist in District 2 of Arizona who is passionate about common-sense gun laws. He spoke to us about his experience meeting with his U.S. House Representative's staff, and how other young people can do the same.

If a young person wants to set up an in-district meeting, where do you suggest they start?

WEBB: I would suggest you start at the house.gov website, where you can enter your zip code and find out what district you're in and who your local representative is. It'll also give you a listing of their offices, including their in-district office and their DC office.

Who participated in your meeting? Was it just you and the congressional staff, or did you have other people join you?

WEBB: It was just myself and one other congressional staff member.

What topics did you focus on? Did you have a direct ask?

WEBB: We talked mostly about guns and the congresswoman's positions. One of my main concerns was how the NRA has contributed to her campaign, though I understand the distinction between what the congressional office does and what the campaign does. One thing I wanted to come up but didn't was some of the shootings we've seen this summer and what my congresswoman is doing about them.

I feel like I could walk into [my representative's office] at any time and voice any concern that I have. That's one thing that I hope people learn from this upcoming week of action: more community members like me can form those relationships with their congressperson's staff members. Whenever you have a concern, you have a way to access your congress member and voice your opinions.

Do you have any advice to engage with reluctant or hesitant elected officials or their staff?

WEBB: I definitely recommend thinking a lot about how you approach the office. We're all passionate, but when it comes down to it, carry yourself in a respectful manner when you're approaching staff or the elected official. Let them know how you feel, and ask for a meeting. And no matter what, always follow up. The follow-up is almost as important as the approach.

How did you follow up?

WEBB: The week after I met with my representative's office I was at a going-away party and I asked if my opinion had gotten up to the congresswoman and I was told it did. Actually, just last week I was at a meeting with another candidate after a contractor's association meeting and I didn't mean to, but I bumped into the congresswoman and I had a

short conversation with her about it. I don't think she's going to vote the way I want her to but I felt like my concern was voiced in the way that Congress needs, especially the House. They need to bring up important bills related to gun violence for a vote, at least give us that.

What was your approach—did you call, email?

WEBB: I always like to find out when my representatives are in town. I'll find an event where they're speaking in the community or at event like a ribbon cutting ceremony, and approach them. I recommend introducing yourself, letting them know what you're passionate about and the issues you're involved with. Either that, or make sure you leave your contact information with their staff, because nine times out of 10, they'll follow up with you again.



TAKE ACTION ONLINE

Interested in joining the gun violence prevention movement online? There is a robust community of activists and organizers sharing information on platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Here's how to get started:

Use your platform(s) to engage your friends and call them to action. Whether you prefer Snapchat to Twitter or Tumblr to Facebook, your voice matters to your followers. Encourage friends and family contact their legislators, share facts and statistics about the gun violence crisis, blast out updates from your local community, and spread the latest news stories surrounding gun violence prevention. Social media is also a great place to tell your personal story and connection to the issue.

Use relevant hashtags to join the ongoing conversation and engage others. Once you have your message, make sure it's seen — #Fight4AFuture and #DisarmHate are both commonly used by Generation Progress and other national organizations.

Promote and live “broadcast” events on your social media pages. Consider streaming platforms such as Facebook Live and Periscope, in addition to live-tweeting to ensure your event is seen around the country.

Capitalize on local and national moments. August 15-19 will be a nationally-recognized week of action that draws attention to the issue of gun violence, but you can also organize around smaller, local moments, like a City Council meeting.

Make content specific to your community. You can choose to highlight what policies are being enacted or should be enacted, resources available in your area, or spotlights on local leaders and activists working to make change.

Use photos, graphics, and videos to draw attention to your message in a creative way. Free platforms like [Canva](#) can help spark your creativity and we've created two graphics to get you started. Click to download and share.



Join or host your own digital event. An organized social media chat or rally is a great way to build buzz. Need help or want to know more? Contact GP's Digital Director Chelsea Coatney at ccoatney@americanprogress.org.



SPREAD YOUR MESSAGE USING THE PRESS

WRITE A PRESS RELEASE OR ADVISORY

If you're interested in having members of the press attend your event, prepare materials that alert them that the event is taking place and that press is welcome — include the basics (who, what, when, where, why), keep it short (one page is perfect), and include graphics or photos if possible.

A **news release or press release** is a written statement that alerts media outlets to a public announcement you're making and is released just before you make your announcement. Your release should contain all the information a reporter might need to write an article, as well as contact information in case he or she has follow up questions.

A **press advisory** alerts the media of an upcoming event and is usually issued a few days before the event to give reporters enough time to add your event to their schedule.

SPREAD THE WORD WITH AN OP-ED OR LETTER TO THE EDITOR

While op-eds and letters to the editor serve similar purposes, a **letter to the editor** offers either a direct comment on a previously-run article or remarks on a current issue in 250 words or less; an **op-ed** serves as a larger platform to fully lay out a unique argument on an issue that expresses the opinion of the author in 700-1,000 words. To be effective, both letters to the editor and op-eds need to be relevant to current news.

- 1. Start with a two-to-three sentence opening.** This is where you should express the point of the column and answer the contextual five Ws: *who, what, when, where, why*. Grab the reader's attention with a one sentence position statement.
- 2. Build up your argument** over the next one-to-two paragraphs. This section transitions your piece from "the lede" to "the rest" by putting your main point in context and answering the question "why do we care?" Describe the urgency, size, and scope of the issue and highlight what's to come.
- 3. From here, expand your point** with evidence, statistics, quotes, anecdotes, and analysis. Over the next three-to-four paragraphs, expand your call to action and recap and expand your initial argument. Include caveats that acknowledge the other side's position and refute it.
- 4. End with a one sentence kicker.** Close your op-ed with an emphasizing quote, detail, or a call to action. Consider echoing a phrase or theme from the opening.

WRITE

Need some inspiration? Copy and paste this sample letter to the editor to use in your local newspaper or use it as starting point to write your own.

Dear Editor:

August 15-19 marks the first annual National Youth Week of Action on gun violence prevention. In a year that has seen what seems like an endless wave of police-involved shootings, community violence, and a lack of accountability or justice for those wronged, this week could not arrive at a more pressing time.

In the throes of a rocky presidential campaign season, these issues have taken center stage and still, we have seen an inability, or unwillingness, from those in power to address them head-on.

As young people, and young people of color especially, gun violence and the criminal justice system disproportionately impact us, our ways of life, and our outlook growing up in this new, still unequal America.

As members of Congress operate from their home districts during the summer recess, we're taking the fight from [Community Name] directly to them. That's why this week, I [one sentence example of what you did this week in your district/community – i.e., met with member of congress, held event, staged a rally, etc.; one sentence personalizing your community within the greater movement].

As the biggest and most diverse generation, this issue impacts us more than anyone. We need to demand change together. For young people, this time is now. As Congress puts off comprehensive action to tackle criminal justice reform and gun violence prevention, I urge you all — of all ages, backgrounds, statuses — to join this week in this fight for justice.

[Your Name]