

Policy Recommendations

Extensive research indicates that comprehensive FPL laws are associated with reductions in violence as well as firearm-related injuries and deaths. This section presents policy recommendations grounded in empirical evidence, aiming to balance the needs of practical implementation while respecting constitutional rights. By leveraging robust data and insights from successful models in various jurisdictions, these recommendations seek to provide critical elements needed to enhance the effectiveness of FPL laws.



PROOF OF FIREARMS SAFETY TRAINING

Most states with FPL laws require the applicant to complete an approved firearm safety course. The training requirements vary significantly by state but generally require learning how to safely handle and store a firearm and learning about key elements of state and federal firearm laws. Some states require more robust safety training; for example, Hawaii requires two hours of live firing at a range. Research suggests that gun owners who went through firearm safety courses influenced their safe storage practices; they are more likely to store their guns safely.³² **Safe storage practices can reduce firearm suicide and unintentional injuries, especially among children and teens.**^{33, 34}



FINGERPRINTING

An application process that includes fingerprinting helps state law enforcement screen out prohibited people who may not be included in the federal background check system. Fingerprinting allows for faster and more accurate identification of the applicant and increases the system's ability to correctly match the applicant to state and federal records through background check processes. Fingerprinting may also act as a deterrent to straw purchasers and be a disincentive to those applying to purchase a firearm to use in a crime if they know their fingerprints will be required for the application.

FPL laws requiring fingerprinting were associated with a 45% decrease in interstate firearm trafficking. In comparison, FPL laws without fingerprinting were not linked to statistically significant reductions in trafficking.³⁵



IN-PERSON STEP

Requiring a step through the FPL application process to be in person helps deter people who may not be disqualified through the background check system but who are at high risk of violence or self-harm. For example, people who have dangerous or unlawful intent (e.g., people planning to engage in straw purchasing, firearms trafficking, or violence, including those at risk of suicide) may be less likely to obtain a gun if they have to interact directly with law enforcement.³⁶ **In-person application processes (including fingerprinting) are linked to a 9% reduction in the firearm homicide rates of urban counties in the states where those processes are required.**³⁷



COMPREHENSIVE BACKGROUND CHECKS

Background checks that rely on state databases and the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) provide added assurance that prohibited people will be accurately identified. Relying solely on the under-resourced NICS may miss disqualifying offenses due to delays in reporting or incomplete records.

State background check processes allow state and local authorities to access more disqualifying records, including records that may not have been reported to the FBI.³⁸ For example, the Massachusetts database of serious misdemeanors that includes domestic violence convictions is inaccessible to the FBI. **FPL laws allow local authorities to search such state databases for disqualifying records.** FPL laws also increase the likelihood that a thorough background eligibility determination is completed before any firearm transfer is made.³⁹



WAITING PERIODS

Requiring a firearm seller to wait a stipulated number of days before transferring a firearm to the purchaser gives federal and state authorities time to complete the required background check(s). Waiting periods between the time an individual submits an FPL application and the time they are approved lasts, on average, 30 days.⁴⁰ Waiting periods address the “default proceed” provision in federal law that allows dealers to transfer a firearm after three days even when a background check on the prospective purchaser is pending.

Built-in waiting periods also help reduce gun violence by preventing individuals in crisis from immediately acquiring a gun, thereby deterring impulsive decisions to perpetrate self-directed or interpersonal violence. Suicidal or homicidal thoughts can be transient or short-lived. Putting time and space between a firearm and a person who is experiencing suicidality increases the possibility that the suicidal thoughts subside and the crisis passes before the person takes lethal action.

Research has found that waiting periods for handgun purchases could be effective on their own in reducing gun violence. An analysis of state-level mandatory waiting periods from 1970 to 2014 found **waiting periods are associated with a 17% reduction in gun homicides and a 7—11% reduction in firearm suicides.**⁴¹