

Combating Gun Violence in Virginia

Virginia has a gun violence crisis. On average, more than 1,000 people die and over 2,000 people are injured from guns every year in the Commonwealth.¹ Gun violence is the leading cause of death among children and teens in Virginia and disproportionately affects Virginia's Black and Brown communities.² Gun violence in Richmond, Newport News, and Norfolk alone account for one quarter of the gun homicide deaths in Virginia.³

Gun violence persisted through the COVID-19 crisis in Virginia; gun deaths increased from 2019 to 2020.⁴ And, in 2021 alone, over 50 Virginians have lost their lives to gun violence – from the killing of a middle school student in Henrico, the tragic death of Sharnez Hill and her infant daughter in Richmond, and [three separate incidents of gun violence in one night](#) that killed two and injured eight in Virginia Beach.⁵ Each one of these deaths was preventable. Each of these communities are suffering trauma and grief. Virginia's next Governor must take action to protect more families from tragedies, and reduce gun violence and suicide.

In the General Assembly, Jenn has led the charge to implement common sense gun solutions that dismantle the laws and gun lobby that perpetuates the cycle of violence and suicide in our communities. Since she entered public service, Jenn has battled the NRA and the gun lobby to implement and advocate for common sense gun solutions. Jenn helped pass legislation requiring individuals to [report lost and stolen firearms](#), reinstated Virginia's "[one gun a month](#)" rule, and required those with protective orders to [relinquish their firearms during pendency of their orders](#). Jenn cosponsored legislation that [strengthened local control to prohibit firearms in public spaces](#), and passed legislation for [universal background checks for gun sales](#) in Virginia. Jenn also supported legislation that [increased the penalty for leaving loaded, unsecured firearms](#) in a manner that endangers a child.

The current gun crisis in Virginia encompasses gun violence, racial inequity, and public health. To meet the challenges of the gun violence epidemic, Virginia needs a leader who will lead with a comprehensive plan to address gun violence. As the next Governor, Jenn will be a leader that all Virginians can trust on gun violence prevention, and will bring her 15 years of legislative experience to pass landmark legislation that protects Virginia's communities.

As Governor, Jenn will:

I. Establish the Virginia Safe Communities Grant Fund

- Jenn will establish the Virginia Safe Communities Grant Fund and invest \$3.6 million dollars in funding for community-tailored initiatives sponsored by local governments and non-profit organizations to reduce gun violence and gun deaths. The Virginia Safe Communities Grant Fund will provide funding for anti-violence initiatives including domestic violence and child abuse prevention, education programs and job training, and behavioral health resources, focusing on trauma-informed

¹ [Gun Violence in Virginia](#), EveryStat.

² [Gun Violence in Virginia](#), EveryStat.

³ [Gun Violence in Virginia](#), EveryStat.

⁴ [COVID, loneliness and despair killed thousands of Virginians](#), Luanne Rife, Roanoke Times

⁵ [Number of Gun Deaths in 2021](#), Gun Violence Archive.

care models to assist individuals navigating behavioral health challenges.

II. Strengthen Gun Purchasing Requirements

- **Require Permit to Purchase checks for sales**

Jenn will introduce legislation to require proof of permit be provided at the time of purchasing a firearm. Currently Virginia law requires a background check at the point-of-sale for a firearm, but those purchasing a firearm do not need to show their permit.

- **Require background checks for those who buy from unlicensed gun sellers**

Despite recent Virginia gun violence reform legislation, existing loopholes still allow some gun purchases to occur without a background check. This includes purchasing online, at gun shows, and gun rentals. The Virginia Tech shooter purchased one of the weapons used to kill 32 innocent people from an online gun seller – and this loophole has still not been closed 14 years later. As Governor, Jenn will close this loophole and introduce legislation mandating background checks for online, gun show. She will work with the General Assembly to reclassify gun rentals as purchases.

III. Ban Assault Weapons

- Jenn will enact legislation to ban any new purchases, sales, and transfers of assault weapons and keep high-powered ammunition and extended magazines over 10 rounds out of Virginia's communities.

IV. Eliminate Open Carry Laws

- Jenn will enact legislation that will decrease the likelihood of gun conflict and limit open carry practices that have been used to intimidate and threaten communities of color since Reconstruction. During the violent 2017 Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, the world saw Virginia's open carry laws used by white supremacists determined to intimidate Black and Brown counter-protestors and the Charlottesville community.

V. Ban "Ghost Guns:"

- Jenn will ban ghost guns – gun assembly kits that are manufactured at home and without traceable serial numbers. Without traceable serial numbers, individuals can avoid existing common sense gun regulations and evade law enforcement oversight under current law.

VI. Repeal the Gun Reciprocity Bill Signed in 2016 by Governor Terry McAuliffe

- [Governor McAuliffe's gun bill](#) erased years of gun violence reform progress and expanded out-of-state concealed carry permit reciprocity with 25 states, many of which had less rigorous permitting requirements. In 2016, Jenn voted against both [House Bill 1163](#) and [Senate Bill 610](#), which allowed gun owners with concealed-weapon permits from states with looser standards than Virginia's to carry concealed weapons into the Commonwealth.⁶ As Governor, Jenn will revoke reciprocity agreements with states that have less stringent background check and permitting requirements.

In the 2020 General Assembly session, Virginia's legislature took expansive steps to keep Virginians safe from gun violence. Despite our progress, there is still work that needs to be done. Jenn is ready to build on the recent progress in Virginia to combat gun violence and will take action by implementing common sense gun violence solutions that save lives and keep communities safer.

Implementing Common Sense Gun Solutions

I. Create and Invest in Virginia Safe Communities Grant Fund and Invest in Behavioral and Mental Health Programming that Combat Gun Violence and Suicides.

65% of annual gun deaths in Virginia are the results of suicide – slightly higher than the national average.⁷⁸ Jenn supports a tailored approach to provide each community with the unique resources it needs to make neighborhoods safe from gun violence. These resources have become even more critical given the mental health challenges facing Virginia communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 2020 state budget, the General Assembly allocated \$2.6 million for gun violence prevention efforts. Jenn will increase this number by \$1 million, and establish the new Virginia Safe Communities Grant Fund to fully fund hundreds of locally tailored gun violence and prevention programs across the Commonwealth.

Jenn’s new Virginia Safe Communities Grant Fund will target specific initiatives within communities and engage local governments, nonprofit organizations, and community stakeholders to address the gun violence epidemic using the tools of local insight and reinvigorate existing or underfunded programs. Community groups and local governments will be eligible for grants to pursue educational and preventative measures against gun violence and suicide. The community grant approach has shown successful outcomes in cities like Chicago and Minneapolis in engaging communities to combat gun violence.⁹ In Chicago, a national epicenter of gun violence, Safe and Peaceful Communities Grants have brought over \$1 million to develop hyperlocal efforts to reduce gun violence, enabling 142 organizations to serve 21 neighborhoods with high gun violence rates.¹⁰ Through the Safe Communities Grant Fund, communities, particularly Virginia’s Black and Brown communities that are disproportionately experience high homicide rates will have the resources to fund programs and initiatives that keep communities from the trauma that can lead to gun violence – like job training programs, combating domestic violence, conflict de-escalation training, and substance abuse services.

In addition, Jenn will devote more resources to fund mental health research and programming that prevents suicide, and use the Virginia Safe Communities Grant Fund to empower localities to address their unique needs within their communities. The pandemic has taken an enormous psychological toll – resulting in undue stress and hardship. As Governor, Jenn will ensure as Virginia emerges from the pandemic, the Commonwealth takes proactive measures to combat the gun violence epidemic.

II. Institute a dual point-of-sale background check and permit requirement for purchase of new guns and require background checks for those who buy from unlicensed gun sellers.

Time after time, whether in the aftermath of a mass shooting or daily gun violence in our communities, the question arises, “how did the shooter get their hands on a gun?” With a universal and multi-step background check and permitting system, Jenn will work to ensure background checks work the way they are supposed to – keep guns out of the hands of those who intend to use them to intimidate, harm, and kill.

Currently, Virginia law requires point-of-sale checks for gun purchases from licensed gun dealers but does not require a permit of purchase for those who buy guns at events like gun shows and private online sales. As Governor, Jenn is committed to truly universal background checks, ensuring that every individual who wants to purchase a gun in Virginia is required to go through the two-step process consisting of the current point-of-sale background check and a subsequent permit registration – adding

7 [Gun Violence in Virginia](#), EveryStat.

8 [Gun Violence in Virginia](#), EveryStat.

9 [Chicago Fund for Safe and Peaceful Communities](#); [Minneapolis Foundation, Fund for Safe Communities](#).

10 [Chicago Fund for Safe and Peaceful Communities](#)

an additional layer of protection from those who wish to do harm with firearms.

Permits provide two major benefits to law enforcement and to communities at large. First, a permit system stops potentially dangerous purchases of firearms before the sale is finalized. Many tragedies are the result of gaps in our gun registry infrastructure. The Virginia Tech shooter managed to kill 32 victims because of miscommunication between state officials and federal requirements. The addition of purchase permits will close these gaps, thwarting the efforts of those who want to commit acts of violence with a firearm. With a robust permit system, state law enforcement will be better equipped to monitor whether firearms are connected to an individual who has engaged in dangerous behavior.

Additionally, the two-step point-of-sale and permit system would apply to guns purchased at authorized gun sellers and at formerly under-regulated venues such as private and online sales and in-person gun shows, finally ending the “gun show” loophole that allows those with domestic abuse restraining orders, felony convictions, and a history of evidence-based dangerous and high-high-risk behavior to purchase firearms.

Jenn will also expand background check requirements to include those who rent guns – while applying common sense hunting, sporting, and family exceptions. In January of this year, [two men died by suicide while shooting at a gun range in Hanover County](#). Both individuals were navigating behavioral health challenges that should have served as a red flag at the time of the gun rental. Because the gun range was not required to conduct background checks, both individuals were able to rent firearms used to end their lives.

With Jenn’s two-step system of point-of-sale background checks and permits to purchase applying to currently regulated sales, gun shows, and private purchases, Virginia will finally have a true universal background check system. Additionally, those who rent guns will be subject to a background check that falls under the point-of-sale check process before being cleared to rent the firearm.

III. Ban Assault Weapons and Reduce Access to Large Capacity Magazines and High Caliber Ammunition.

From her early years in the legislature, Jenn has fought to remove military-grade assault weapons from our streets and communities and limit access to large capacity magazines and high caliber ammunition that increases the potential for violence. According to the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, any firearm magazine with the capacity to hold more than 10 rounds is considered “large capacity.”¹¹ These large capacity firearms are frequently used in mass shootings and 40% of serious violent crimes across the nation and have the potential to harm a greater amount of people in a shorter amount of time.¹² Jenn has worked for the last decade to remove these military-grade weapons from our communities. In 2011, she [cosponsored a bill](#) that would have prohibited any person from selling, bartering, or transferring a firearms magazine designed to hold more than 20 rounds of ammunition.

Jenn will propose legislation that limits magazine capacity to 10 rounds. She will also bring forth legislation that bans new assault rifles and high capacity firearms sales in Virginia as a preventative measure to reduce mass shootings once and for all. Banning assault weapons of war from our streets is overwhelmingly supported by 67% of Americans.¹³ Banning assault weapons is preventative, popular, and common sense – and Jenn will ensure that Virginians are protected.

¹¹ [Large Capacity Magazines](#), Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

¹² [Large Capacity Magazines](#), Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

¹³ [Assault Weapons](#), Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

IV. Eliminate Virginia's Open Carry Laws.

During the 2020 General Assembly session, armed demonstrators gathered at the Virginia Capitol, placing the city of Richmond on high alert and costing Virginia taxpayers. The crowd used Virginia's open carry gun laws to intimidate those inside the building and surrounding area, while then-President Donald Trump also encouraged them to show up. Even before demonstrators moved on Virginia's Capitol, Virginians, along with the world, watched white supremacists march through the streets of Charlottesville, using Virginia's open carry laws to threaten and intimidate. The actions in Charlottesville are but one example of a long and painful history that began during the Reconstruction era of using violence and intimidation to oppress and discriminate against Black and Brown citizens and communities.

Open carry laws intimidate citizens and can increase the likelihood of conflict – increasing the threat for violence and potentially causing confusion for law enforcement.¹⁴ Jenn supported legislation in the General Assembly to enable localities to [prohibit firearms from public spaces](#) in 2020. That is why when Jenn is Governor of Virginia, she will propose legislation to end open carry laws and promote policies that effectively limit gun violence and intimidation.

V. Expand Prohibitions for Those Convicted of Domestic Violence

In the General Assembly, Jenn led efforts to pass legislation that continues to protect survivors of domestic violence and holds perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse accountable. In 2016 she [cosponsored the bill](#) that made it a felony for individuals who were subjects of permanent protective orders to retain their firearms during the pendency of their order after 24 hours.

As Governor, Jenn will ensure survivors of domestic abuse and violence are safe from their perpetrators. She will lead efforts to legislatively require an explicit removal of firearms from the scene of domestic violence incidents and prohibit individuals convicted of domestic violence misdemeanors from possessing firearms and ammunition.¹⁵

VI. Enact Legislation that Bans "Ghost Guns."

Ghost guns are gun parts and assembly kits that are bought online and manufactured at home. Ghost guns currently allow individuals to assemble a weapon easily without traceable serial numbers. According to Everytown for Gun Safety, an AR-15 assault rifle assembly kit, a firearm frequently used in mass shootings, costs only \$345 and can be assembled in hours.¹⁶ Without traceable serial numbers, individuals can avoid existing gun laws and evade law enforcement oversight, potentially resulting in untraceable violent actions and requiring added expenses for law enforcement and taxpayers.

Jenn will ban the sale of ghost gun parts and assembly kits in Virginia and work with the Biden-Harris administration and federal and local law enforcement to crack down on individuals who seek to sidestep the gun safety system. Other states have begun to record data on ghost guns. Washington D.C. saw an uptick in ghost gun confiscations from 3 in 2017 to over 100 in 2020.¹⁷ However, currently, Virginia State Police do not record ghost gun data because they are not required to do so. In addition to the ghost gun ban, Jenn will direct the Virginia State Police to monitor and record data on recovered ghost guns.¹⁸

¹⁴ [Open Carry Laws](#), Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence

¹⁵ [Domestic Violence and Firearms in Virginia](#), Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

¹⁶ [Ghost Guns: What They Are and Why They Are an Issue Now](#), Annie Karni, New York Times.

¹⁷ [D.C. Mayor, police chief want to keep untraceable 'ghost guns' out of District](#), Peter Hermann, Washington Post.

¹⁸ [Biden wants to restrict 'ghost guns' after ban fails in Virginia General Assembly: some Virginians still in opposition](#), Jackie DeFusco, 10WAVY.

VII. Repeal The 2016 McAuliffe Gun Reciprocity Deal.

Jenn will end the 2016 reciprocity deal that weakened Virginia's defenses against gun violence by creating reciprocity relationships with states that do not meet Virginia's gun safety and permitting standards. In 2016, Governor Terry McAuliffe made a deal with the GOP and the gun lobby that expanded out-of-state concealed carry permit reciprocity with 25 states, many which had looser permitting rules than Virginia – after a hard and successful fight by Virginia's Attorney General to end reciprocity agreements and keep more Virginians safe. As Governor, Jenn will not compromise Virginians' safety just to make a deal. In 2016, [Jenn voted against the bill](#) that led to Governor McAuliffe's deal that expanded gun permit reciprocity. As Governor, Jenn will propose legislation that eliminates reciprocity relationships with states that do not meet Virginia's latest gun safety standards.

Conclusion

In April of 2021, the City of Richmond, including some of Jenn's Senate district, experienced a string of shootings that [left six people dead and four injured over the course of six days](#). Within the six-day onslaught, five of the six who died were under 21 years old or younger. All of the violence was senseless and the deaths and injuries preventable. Unfortunately, this violent week mirrors so many others in communities across the Commonwealth that have hurt, killed, and traumatized adults and children alike.

Jenn is the proud mom of two school-age kids and wants her children and every child to grow up in a community and a Commonwealth that is safe from violence and fear. Jenn knows that people want to be and feel safe in their communities. The pain and tragedy that stems from gun violence creates ripple effects of trauma that can lead to more violence and challenges for Virginia's families and communities. Though Virginia has made great strides in addressing gun violence, there is still more work to be done.

By implementing common sense solutions and investing and engaging in community-led and preventative measures, Jenn will enact policies that keep Virginia from experiencing and repeating the same cycles of gun violence in Virginia.