



## Support Colorado Senate Bill 23-169: Prohibit Teenagers from Buying Guns

**Bottom Line:** Colorado continues to demonstrate its commitment to take important steps to prevent gun violence. In policies ranging from requiring background checks on all firearm sales to keeping guns out of the hands of domestic abusers to an extreme risk law, Colorado has enacted critical legislation to keep its communities safe. Colorado has the opportunity to further strengthen its laws and save lives by passing SB 23-169, prohibiting teenagers from purchasing guns and requiring them to obtain hunting certification before being able to legally possess a gun.

### ❑ **Adolescents under 21 are at a particular risk of gun violence.**

- 18 to 20-year-olds commit gun homicides at triple the rate of adults 21 and older.<sup>1</sup>
- Between 2011 and 2020, the rate of firearm suicide has increased 53 percent among young Americans aged 10 to 24. Colorado saw the second-fastest growing firearm suicide rate during this time, with a 121 percent increase in among young people.<sup>2</sup>
- The area of the brain responsible for judgment and impulse control is not fully developed in 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds, meaning that they can be more prone to aggressive behavior. Decades of scientific evidence demonstrate that adolescents and young adults make riskier decisions than adults.<sup>3</sup>
- Prior to the Club Q shooting, law enforcement had seized a semiautomatic rifle from the then 20-year-old shooter, who vowed to become the next "mass killer."

### ❑ **Under current law, 18-, 19-, and 20-year olds can legally purchase rifles and shotguns.**

- Under federal law, a person must be 21 to buy a handgun, or 18 to buy a rifle or shotgun, from a federally licensed gun dealer. Colorado law currently prohibits the sale of firearms to people under 18.
- This means that 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds can legally purchase rifles and shotguns, whether from a gun store or a private individual.
- The gaps in the law leave an easy path for young people who wish to perpetrate acts of gun violence, including mass shootings, to obtain firearms.

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<sup>1</sup> Everytown analysis using FBI Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) and US Census American Community Survey data 2016–2020.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. A percent change was developed using 2011 and 2020 crude rates for young people ages 10–24.

<sup>3</sup> American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. "Teen Brain: Behavior, Problem Solving, and Decision Making," September 2017. <https://tinyurl.com/2p8ptxk7>.



- Because he was under 21, federal law prohibited the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooter from going into a gun store and purchasing a handgun, but he was able to legally buy the AR-15 assault-style rifle he used in the shooting.<sup>4</sup>
- Following the shooting, Florida changed its law to raise the age to purchase all firearms to 21.<sup>5</sup>
- States across the country are taking steps to the age gap in federal law: seven states and Washington DC have increased the minimum purchase age for long guns to 21,<sup>6</sup> and two additional states have laws setting the age at 21 for the purchase of semi-automatic rifles.<sup>7</sup>
- **SB 23-169 would require people under 21 to have hunter education certification, which includes firearm safety training, in order to possess any firearm.**
  - Under current Colorado law, a person must be 18 in order to possess a handgun, with no minimum age for possession of a long gun – and no training is required whatsoever.
  - The bill would raise the age to possess any firearm to 21, but would allow people under 21 to possess guns if they have obtained a hunter education card issued by the Parks and Wildlife Commission.
    - Obtaining a hunter education card requires completing a class that includes instruction on laws and regulations, firearm safety and handling, a written test, and live fire exercise.
  - Firearm training can meaningfully improve public safety. In a self-defense experiment involving a firearm simulator, participants with lower levels of firearm training and experience performed worse than their counterparts with higher levels of training. In the simulation, many accidentally shot innocent bystanders or unarmed people.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission, "Initial Report Submitted to the Governor, Speaker, of the House of Representatives, and Senate President," January 2, 2019, <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/MSDHS/CommissionReport.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Fla. Stat. §790.065(13).

<sup>6</sup> California, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Limited exceptions apply in some states.

<sup>7</sup> New York and Washington

<sup>8</sup> Vince Jr, Joseph J, et al. Firearms Training and Self-Defense. Does the Quality and Frequency of Training Determine the Realistic Use of Firearms by Citizens for Self-Defense?: Facts and Evidence for Public Policy Considerations. Mount St. Mary's University, The National Gun Victims Action Council. 2015. Chicago, Illinois.