



2021 Issue Paper: Gun Safety

LWV Positions on Gun Safety

The LWV of the United States' position is to protect the health and safety of citizens through limiting the accessibility and regulating the ownership of handguns and semi-automatic weapons. The LWVUS supports regulation of firearms for consumer safety.

The League of Women Voters of Washington's position is that government should regulate ownership and possession of firearms and limit their accessibility. The LWVWA position on gun safety, as defined in the [LWVWA Program in Action 2019-2021](#), states:

- Government should regulate ownership and possession of firearms and limit their accessibility. (GS-1)
- Firearms should be regulated by government through measures which may include the following:
 - Federal: applications to purchase; registration; manufacturers' and dealers' license fees; restrictions on owning, transporting and distributing; prohibition on types and places allowed, extended waiting periods. (GS-2)
- Taxes and license fees should be increased to help pay for:
 - education about firearm safety
 - background and verification checks for gun purchasers
 - violence prevention programs and measures
 - investigation and prosecution of illegal trafficking in firearms. (GS-3)
- Measures should be taken to limit young people's access to firearms. These should include the following:
 - gun-free zones in school areas
 - an age limit of 18 for the use and possession of guns
 - requirements for safe gun storage (GS-4)
- Civil and criminal parental liability under certain circumstances. (GS-5)

Current Status of Gun Safety Issues in Washington

Major progress on gun safety issues in Washington has come about through the initiative as opposed to the legislative process. The 2020 session clarified some initiative provisions and streamlined background checks using a statewide system through the State Patrol rather than local law enforcement. Also passed was an expansion of gun-free zones to include child care

centers. The legislature also passed measures to ban weapons without serial numbers or identification. The LWVWA also works with the Alliance for Gun Responsibility.

Initiative 594

This initiative, which passed by a wide margin in 2014, closed a gaping loophole in the background check process. Now, all gun purchases, whether were made at a licensed dealer, gun show, or private transaction, must go through the federal background check process.

Initiative 1491

Suicides in Washington still account for over 70% of gun deaths. The legislature took action in 2016 with voluntary educational measures aimed at gun dealers. Initiative 1491 allows law enforcement to remove weapons from individuals in danger of harming themselves or others after a judge grants an Extreme Risk Protection Order to a family or household members.

Initiative 1639

Passed in November 2018, this initiative gave Washington State some of the most effective gun safety measures. The age for purchasing an assault-style weapon increased from 18 to 21. The law brings assault weapons to the same standards currently required for handguns. The measure requires an enhanced local law enforcement background check, a waiting period, and safety training.

The initiative also incentivizes safe storage by requiring gun dealers to offer safe storage devices and to post warnings about the dangers of weapons in the home. Gun owners who allow unsecured firearms to fall into the hands of prohibited individuals who then injure others may be subjected to criminal or civil penalties.

Though challenged in federal court by gun rights organizations, the initiative restrictions on guns were ruled constitutional.

Other gun legislation

In 2018, the legislature passed a ban on bump stocks.

Cities and counties, including Seattle and King County, have also passed legislation to require gun owners to secure their guns. Some are being challenged in court by gun rights organizations.

Outlook for 2021 Session

Still awaiting legislative action are bills to limit high-capacity ammunition magazines and to ban the sale of assault-style weapons. Though bills were approved in committee, they did not reach the floor for a vote. The Law and Justice Committee is likely to take up a review of our state

open-carry laws and possible restriction of weapons from the capitol grounds and other public spaces. Washington State also lacks laws regulating ammunition sales.

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