

Gun Violence Prevention Research and Policy: A Presentation to the Public Safety Committee

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UNIVERSITY
of VIRGINIA

SCHOOL of LAW

AGENDA

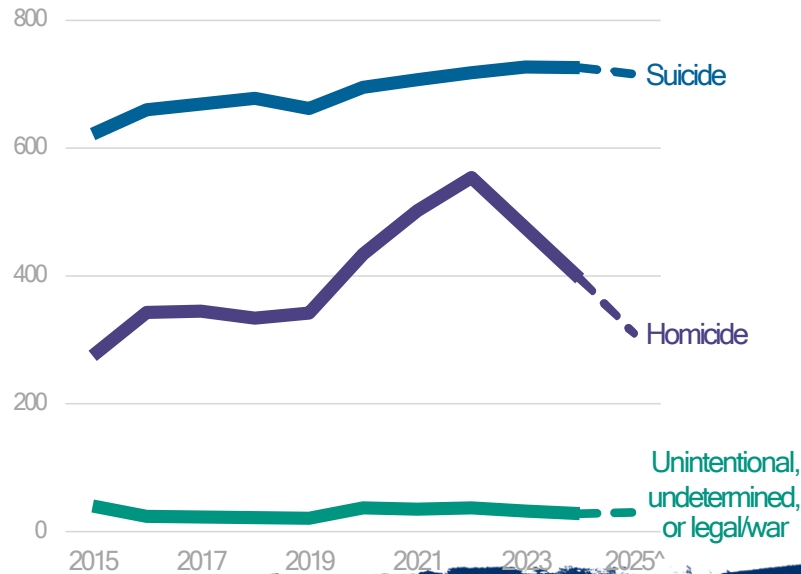
- **Data**
- **Recent Research**
- **Legislation/Budget Actions from '26**
 - **Proposed**
 - **Passed**
 - **In the courts**
- **New Developments**
- **Issues/Policy for Future Consideration**

DATA and TRENDS

Source: Virginia Vital Events and Screening Tracking System, Department of Health
^2025 death data are preliminary and subject to change

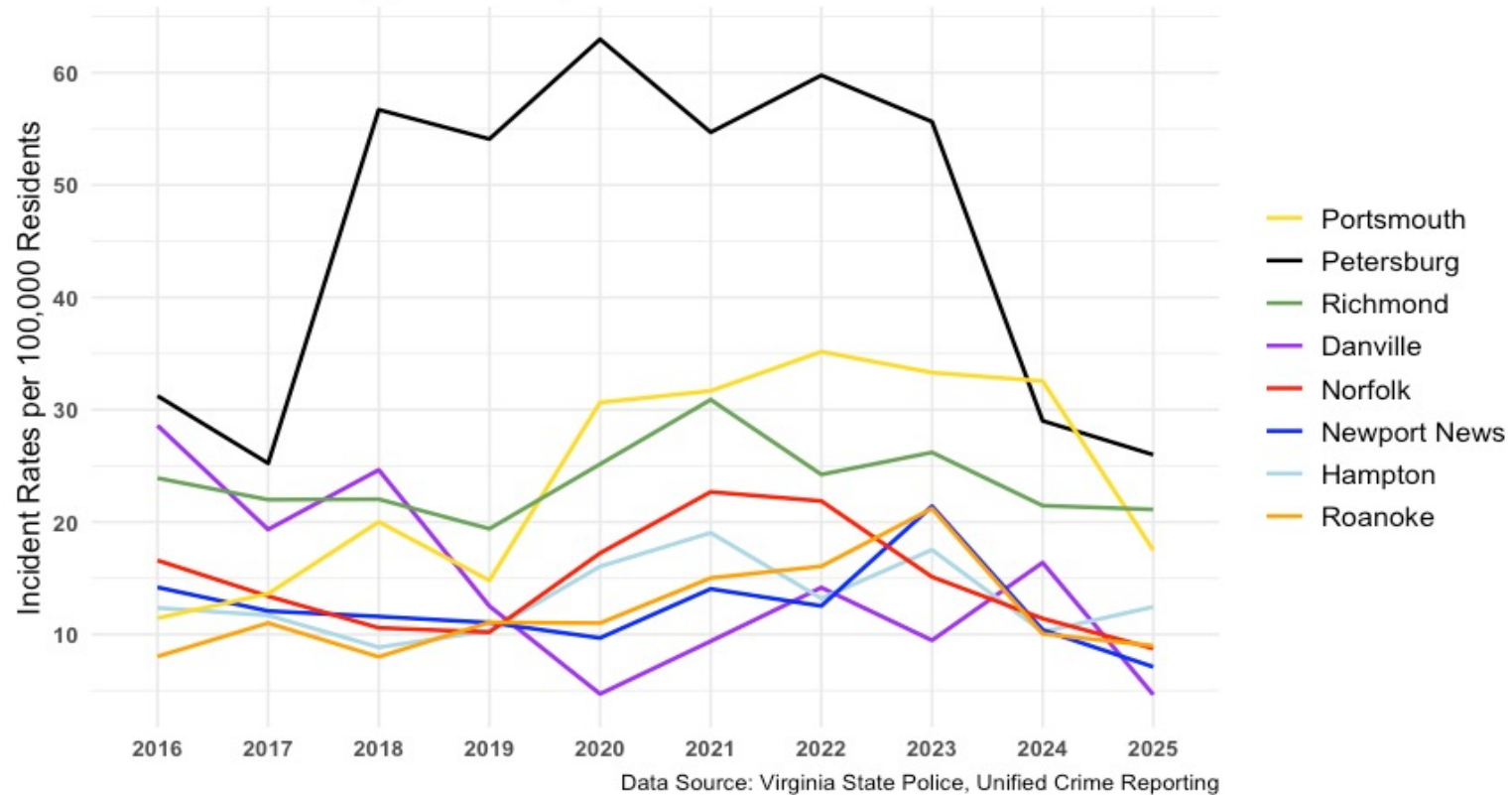
From 2015 to 2024, firearm-related **suicide** deaths increased **17%** and **homicide** deaths increased (peaking in '22) **44%**.

Preliminary 2025 data show a stable trend for **suicide** and decreasing trend for **homicide** from 2024.

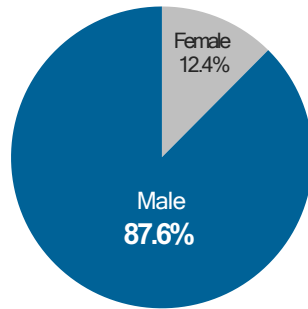


Fatal Gun Violence Rates

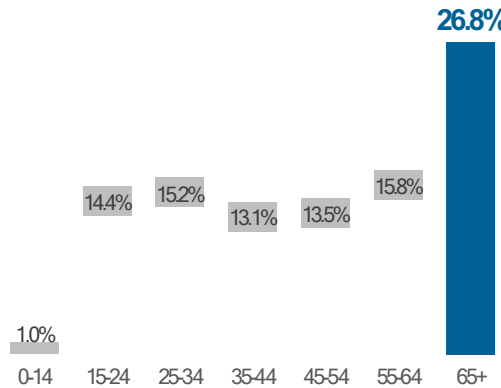
Homicide and Nonnegligent Manslaughter



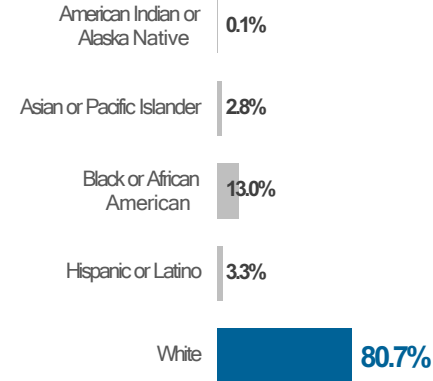
From 2020 to 2025^, the highest proportion of firearm-related **suicide deaths** were among:



Males

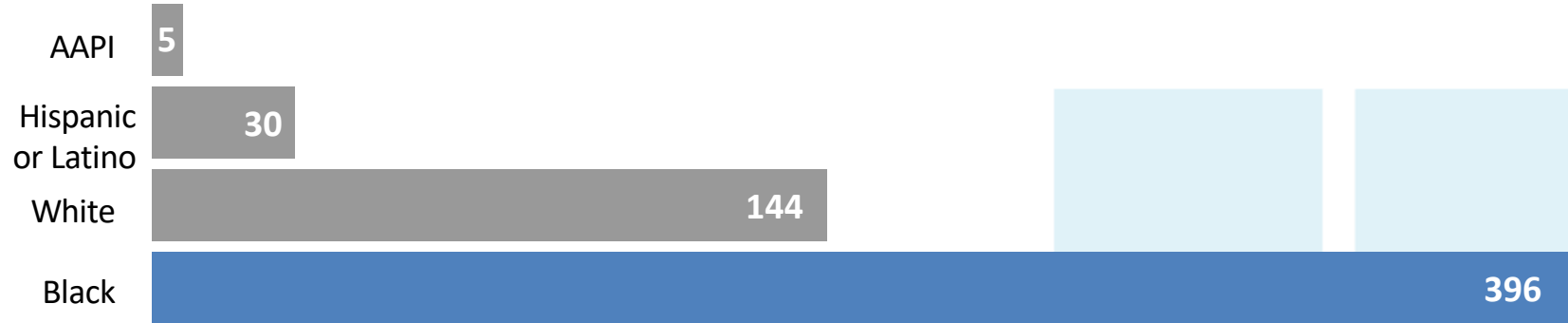


Virginians 65+



White Virginians

Young Black men ages 15–34 were more than 18 times as likely to get murdered as white Virginians



TRENDS (BASED ON VDH ANALYSIS)

- Firearm related emergency department visits are continuing to decline from peak in '21.
- Same with firearm related hospitalizations (which peaked in '22).
- Homicide rates have also declined, while suicide rates have remained steady.
- More people die by suicide (6 in 10) with a firearm than homicide.
- Older white males most likely to be suicide victims.
- Younger black males most likely to be murder victims.
- Guns are leading cause of death for children in Virginia.

RECENT RESEARCH

“EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY GUN VIOLENCE”: JLARC (12/25)

• Key Findings

- **Interpersonal conflict leads to community gun violence** — at least one-third of street-violence homicides followed an argument or fight, and roughly one-quarter involved criminal activity (mostly drug-related); **only 4–8% were classified as gang-related**
- **Firearm injuries are worse** — more lethal, severe, and costlier to treat than other assault injuries
- **Ripple effects** — community violence harms local economies and schools (attendance, engagement, staffing)
- **Mental health care gaps** — Virginia's highest-violence localities also face mental health provider shortages
- **Programs work, funding is uneven** — evidence-based prevention/intervention programs are expanding, but funding hasn't reached all high-violence localities equally

• Key Recommendations

- **Budget — fund cycle:** convert Safer Communities from an annually- to biennially-reverting special fund (DCJS-administered); most FY24 funds went unspent under the current 1-year cycle
- **Expand eligibility:** extend Safer Communities funding to the five high-violence localities not currently covered (Danville, Hampton, Hopewell, Newport News, Petersburg)

IN THEIR OWN VOICES: UVA FACULTY (11/25)

- **58 interviews** with young people or the people who work with them, from gun violence hot spot communities in Virginia.
- **Informed by convenings** with local and law-enforcement leaders from same jurisdictions.
- **Data review and Literature Review** with focus on *Unforgiving Places*
- **Developed policy recommendations** for local, state, community, law enforcement, and federal leaders

Four Main Questions

- In what ways do fear and perceived threats influence youth engagement with gun violence in Virginia?
- How might social media contribute to youth gun violence?
- Which changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic are still present in Virginian youths' lives, and how do they continue to shape gun violence risk?
- What would it take for people to feel safer in your community?

COVID-19 Pandemic Made Things Worse

*"I think it created a separation, because we was all quarantined for so long. I think it just created a separation to where it felt lonely. We just felt loneliness. **We didn't have nothing to do. We couldn't be with nobody. It was just lonely.***

The whole thing about it is it was just lonely."

—Age 13, Roanoke

"I think that's changing our social dynamics a bunch, to make kids draw to social media even more because a bunch of them are like, we don't want to go to school, so, we're just gonna do the online school. But then they're losing the social component of school. So now they're just picking up even heavier on social media."

—Age 29, Richmond

*"I feel like COVID really had people alone, and I feel like people didn't know how to cope with being alone. So that built up rage and tension. People lost their jobs, people lost their family members. I feel like everyone was put on isolation that was unwarranted, and they didn't know how to react off it. **So that just built up anger and aggression towards everything..."***

—Age 21, Richmond

Social Media Plays a Toxic Role

“So if you’re scrolling Instagram or TikTok constantly and you’ve seen a hundred videos of people just being careless with weapons, being careless with each other’s lives, and you’re just going to pick that up and it just repeats over and over. Your brain just attaches to that.”

—Age 23, Lynchburg

*“... They’re striving to get their hands on a gun, mind you, they’re only 11-12 years old. They become completely desensitized to the weight of a gun, both physically and metaphorically because **that’s not something they’ve even remotely grown up around, but they see it everywhere once they log on to their devices.**”*

—Age 25, Amherst

“A lot of people are goading it on. It’s like stepping into a coliseum and now you either the lion or you the gladiator.”

—Age 25, Norfolk

Fear Drives Carrying

“We had the old saying, ‘I’d rather get caught with than without it.’... There’s a threat out there for my life, my friends’ life, my family’s life. So I gotta be prepared, and that’s the conversations that they’re having amongst themselves, peer to peer, like... ‘You don’t have a gun?! Why not?’”

—Age 48, Roanoke

“And a lot of young boys, they tend to carry guns and feel like they need to be protected, because they have been in beef or whatever with other young boys... First of all, they feel like it’s to protect them. They feel like that’s the only way to solve a problem.”

—Age 16, Roanoke

“Okay, nobody helping me, I go and [tell] older people this happening to me, that happening to me and nobody doing anything. So, I’m gonna take it up on my own hand. I’m gonna go get my own help,’ and they run to the weapon right there...”

— Age 25, Charlottesville

OTHER FINDINGS

- Limited number of places – HOT SPOTS - where we have a community violence problem.
- Correlation (causation?) between chronic absenteeism and gun violence.
- **Alignment between community voices, local gov't work, and research**
- People are doing amazing work (reflected in the data) and law enforcement and community members are working together.
- Too many guns ("I can find a gun faster than I can find a job")

2026 Legislative Session

2026 SESSION SIGNED LEGISLATION

Weapons & Devices Restrictions

- **HB 217 / SB 749** — Assault weapons & large-capacity magazine ban
- **HB 1524 / SB 727** — Statewide public-carry ban on assault firearms
- **HB 40 / SB 323** — Ghost gun ban

Purchaser & Possessor Eligibility

- **HB 1525 / SB 643** — Prohibits all firearm purchases for people under 21 (incorporating age restriction)
- **HB 19 / SB 160** — 3-year firearm ban after misdemeanor domestic/intimate-partner violence
- **HB 1015** — Firearm prohibition for misdemeanor hate-crime conviction
- **HB 901 / SB 495** — Red flag (ERPO) law expansion
- **HB 93 / SB 38** — Lawful transfer option for prohibited firearm owners

2026 SESSION SIGNED LEGISLATION

Where & How Firearms May Be Carried or Stored

- **HB 626 / SB 272** — Increased campus-carry restrictions at public universities
- **HB 229 / SB 173** — Weapons ban in mental health/developmental hospitals
- **HB 871 / SB 348** — Safe storage required in homes where minors/prohibited persons reside
- **HB 110 / SB 496** — Secure storage of handguns in unattended vehicles
- **HB 24 / SB 115** — Ends automatic concealed-carry reciprocity with other states

2026 SESSION SIGNED LEGISLATION

Industry Liability, Training Requirements & Institutional Programs

- **HB 21 / SB 27** — Firearm industry civil liability for irresponsible conduct
- **HB 101** — Electronic submission of permit applications
- **HB 916** — Revises concealed-carry training requirements
- **HB 702** — Local firearm give-back/sell-back programs authorized
- **HB 969 / SB 364** — Gun violence prevention center workgroup established
- **HB 1523** — Certified violence prevention professional credential defined
- **HB 1300 / SB 86** — Survivor purchase of officer's service weapon

2026 FAILED LEGISLATION

- **SB 78** — Higher mandatory minimum for repeat violent firearm offenders
- **SB 79** — Highway rest-area exemption from state gun-free zones
- **HB 207** — \$500 tax on firearm suppressors
- **SB 643** — Handgun permit-to-purchase requirement (age-21 piece enacted via HB 1525)
- **HB 700** — 5-day waiting period on firearm purchases
- **SB 723** — Permitless concealed carry for permit-eligible individuals
- **HB 1359** — Permit-to-purchase requirement for all firearms

IN LITIGATION: ASSAULT WEAPONS BAN

- **HB 217 / SB 749** — Bans sale, manufacture, and transfer of assault firearms (feature-based definition covering most semi-automatic centerfire rifles/pistols/shotguns, including AR-15s) and magazines more than 15 rounds.
 - Enacted, but enforcement is enjoined statewide.
- **Litigation status** — 4 state court cases and the federal DOJ suit are stayed pending SCOTUS's decision in *Viramontes v. Cook County* (consolidated with *Grant v. Higgins*). The statewide preliminary injunction remains in force in the meantime.
- ***Viramontes v. Cook County*** — Challenges an Illinois law banning the possession, sale, and transfer of assault weapons, including AR-15s plus any semiautomatic rifle that can accept a magazine holding more than 10 rounds.
 - **Certified question** — Does the Second Amendment protect an individual's right to own AR-15-style and similar semiautomatic rifles? Decision expected by June 2027.

2026 BUDGET ACTIONS – PREVENTION!

- **EXPANSION OF FVIP** (Firearm Violence Intervention and Prevention) Grants – 7 million increase
 - Hospital Based Programs, Outreach workers, Violence Interrupters
- **EXPANSION OF SAFER COMMUNITIES** – 8 MILLION PER YEAR (To local govt's for comprehensive planning and approach)
 - Expanded To Hampton, Newport News, Hopewell, Pburg And Danville
 - All Nine Localities With Highest Rates Of Gun Violence Now Have Funding
- **TOTAL PREVENTION/INTERVENTION FUNDING = 38 million per year**
- **WORTH NOTING – FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY BUILDERS** to help schools tackle chronic absenteeism.

CURRENT ISSUES/DEVELOPMENTS/OPPORTUNITIES

- **HB 969 / SB 364: Study for establishment of Office of Gun Violence Prevention (Report Due in December)**
- **University Partnerships – VCU and UVA**
- **Court decision on assault weapons ban**
- **Potential ATF Regulatory Rollbacks**
 - **Loosens background-check & point-of-sale screening**
 - **Raises the bar for holding dealers accountable**
 - **Loosens import & interstate-transport restrictions**
 - **Procedural posture** — comments closed; VA AG among opponents. ATF has no deadline to act and can finalize, revise, or abandon any proposal. Awaiting ATF's next action.

POTENTIAL FUTURE POLICY AREAS – FIREARM PURCHASER LICENSES

- Requires a license from State Police before a dealer may sell/transfer a firearm
- According to Crime Commission Study (and other sources):
 - Homicide reduction research is favorable or inconclusive.
 - Suicide prevention research is favorable or mixed.
 - Trafficking Prevention research is favorable:
 - **Recommendations:** VSCC sets forth policy options in addition to full on adoption, including isolated components of FPL (fingerprinting, waiting period, and/or mandatory firearm safety course).
 - **Fiscal impact:** HB 1359: cost undetermined.
 - Comparison: Crime Commission notes the fiscal impact in Delaware: **\$2.6M one-time setup cost + ~\$8M first-year operating**, rising to **\$9M by year 3**
 - **Constitutionality:** VSCC asserts that **Fourth Circuit precedent is favorable to Permit-to-Purchase.**

ADDITIONAL POTENTIAL FUTURE POLICY AREAS

- Dealer Licensing — State-level licensing/oversight of firearm dealers (might help respond to ATF changes)
- Gun Violence Prevention Workforce Sustainability
- How do we maintain the progress?
- Tracking impact of budget actions
 - Safer Communities
 - FVIP
- Suicide reduction
- Domestic Violence and Gun Safety
- Standing up an office of Gun Violence Prevention

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION