



This September, as 1.7 million Pennsylvanian kids headed back to school, CeaseFirePA and our coalition partners launched our *Keeping Kids Safe at School* campaign. We contrasted real solutions to prevent gun violence at school, like life-saving gun safety laws, with ineffective “solutions” like arming teachers or giving kids bulletproof backpacks. Here’s just some of what we’ve achieved in one month:

- Over 1,000 Pennsylvanians sent [advocacy petitions](#) to their state legislators.
- We held a [series of five town halls](#) across the Commonwealth featuring students, educators, legislators, public health professionals, and law enforcement.
- Our demands got extensive [coverage by the media](#) and we had [an op-ed published](#) and mailed to households across PA.

What’s the last missing piece to close-out our campaign? Your voice in your local media. In a short amount of time, you can write a letter to the editor in your local newspaper and engage your neighbors in this important discussion. You’d be surprised how many people read these letters and learn from them!

This toolkit will help you write a great letter to the editor about how stronger gun safety laws are the real way to keep our kids safe at school. Questions? Contact Josh Fleitman: josh.fleitman@ceasefirepa.org.

The Gun Safety Laws that Will Actually Keep Kids Safe at School

Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs - often called “red flag” laws) would create a legal process to temporarily remove firearms from someone who is at-risk of committing a school shooting.

Universal background checks would close off a gap in our system that allows assault rifles – now the weapon of choice in mass shootings – to be bought from private sellers without *any* vetting.

Safe storage would require that guns be stored securely in the home, keeping guns away from kids and cutting off the source of the gun in over 76% of school shootings.

Lost and stolen gun reporting would address a major driver of illegal guns and help stop firearm trafficking to minors.

Suggested Outline For Your Letter to the Editor

1. Start off with your “why” – your personal reason why you care about keeping kids safe at school. Are you a parent of a student? Do you work in a school? Do you simply feel like it should be a basic part of freedom that schools should be safe from gun violence? Make an emotional connection in 1-3 sentences.
2. Make the point that evidence is clear how we can prevent gun violence in schools: policies that proactively stop the gun from getting into the shooter’s hand – not reactive policies that make schools feel like prisons with armed staff and metal detectors.
3. Give one example of a gun safety policy, explain how it works to improve safety and why you support it. Pick whichever one of the above 4 speaks most to you. More detailed talking points are below for each policy. You can try to cover more than one policy if you’d like, but that gets challenging with the limited amount of space available in a letter to the editor.
4. Close by urging your neighbors to join you in refusing to accept a world where kids are afraid to go to school, and that the way we achieve that is by each of us making our voice heard and contacting our state legislators. If you’d like, you can refer people to CeaseFirePA.org to learn more and take action.

Talking Points for Your Letter

General points on school gun violence

- There were [at least 21 school-related shootings since 2015 in Pennsylvania alone](#), impacting rural, suburban, and urban communities.
- Even if your child’s school isn’t directly impacted by a shooting, how many of us have had to comfort our kid when they got home traumatized after an active shooter drill?
- Making schools feel like prisons by taking a reactive approach to “harden schools” doesn’t work:
 - Look at Parkland and Uvalde, where police were on-scene and were completely ineffective.
 - Find lots more myths vs. facts about keeping kids safe at school [HERE](#).

Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs - often called “red flag” laws)

- [Almost all school shooters “leak” their plans ahead of time](#). This creates an opportunity to use an Extreme Risk Protection Order to disarm them through a [civil legal procedure overseen by a judge](#), with full due process protections.
- The only way under current PA law to remove a firearm from someone who may hurt themselves or others is to have them involuntarily committed to a mental health facility. That has stigma and trauma associated with it and isn’t always the right solution. An



ERPO is a civil process that can remove the immediate danger of a firearm while giving people time and space needed to seek help for a mental health crisis.

- 21 mass shootings were stopped by ERPOs in California alone in just 3 years.
- 21 states and Washington, DC now have some kind of ERPO law on the books – PA should be next.
- This bill passed the PA House of Representatives with bipartisan support and is awaiting a hearing in the PA Senate Judiciary Committee.

Universal Background Checks

- [Long guns are now used in the majority of mass shootings](#). Yet in Pennsylvania, one can buy these firearms from a private seller without a background check. Universal background check legislation would close this loophole and help prevent shooters from obtaining weapons of war.
- This gap in our safety system makes no sense: if you wanted to buy that very same type of gun from a licensed firearm dealer, you would have to go through a background check.
- Thousands of people try to buy a gun in PA every year but are stopped because they fail a background check. This basic procedural safeguard should be expanded to cover all gun sales – especially the type of gun that is increasingly the weapon of choice for mass school shootings.
- People with felony convictions, who have been involuntarily committed to a mental health facility, or with other certain offenses on their record would be prevented from buying the long gun if they were forced to go through a background check.
- This bill passed the PA House of Representatives with bipartisan support and is awaiting a hearing in the PA Senate Judiciary Committee.

Safe Storage

- According to a [study done by the U.S. Secret Service](#), in 76% of school shootings where the shooter was under age 18, they acquired the gun from the home of the parent or another close relative who did not store the gun securely.
- PA is one of a [minority of states](#) that has no legal requirements for the secure storage of firearms in the home.

- A safe storage law would help prevent these tragedies by requiring gun owners to lock up their weapons in the home when not in use or if a child lives in the home.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends gun owners store firearms unloaded, locked and separate from ammunition. This is especially true if you have children in your home. Still, [5.4 million minors live in a home with firearms that aren't stored in a gun safe or with a safety device](#) such as a trigger or cable lock.
- Safe storage not only helps to prevent school shootings, but also youth suicides and unintentional shootings. It also helps prevent firearm theft, which diverts deadly weapons into an underground market that fuels violent crime.

Lost or Stolen Gun Reporting

- In PA, it's illegal to possess a handgun if you're under age 21 or a long gun under age 18. So by definition, the guns that youth school shooters use are illegal. But how did they get the gun in the first place?
 - Aside from insecure storage mentioned above, often in urban schools, the answer is that the gun was bought by a legal purchaser, then illegally trafficked into the underground market and into the hands of a young person (that's known as "straw purchasing"). When that straw purchaser is approached by law enforcement, they claim that the gun was "lost" or "stolen."
 - This is a common [defense in court](#) because **PA has no law that requires lost or stolen guns to be reported**. So under existing law, the straw purchaser can evade accountability – they've legally done nothing wrong by failing to report the gun "missing" before it was used in a crime.
- Simple legislation would require gun owners to report the theft or loss of a gun within 72 hours of discovering it missing.
- Without the legal requirement to report lost or stolen firearms, those who illegally transfer guns to youth or others who intend to cause harm will continue to be able to do so with impunity.
- A "Lost or Stolen" law would both make gun owners more accountable *and* allow law enforcement to better staunch the flow of illegal guns into our communities.
- One study revealed that these laws reduce illegal firearm trafficking Kahane found reporting laws reduced the [movement of illegal gun movement by 46%](#). Another study found crime guns originating in states with a [lost & stolen law were 30% less likely to end up in another state than guns that came from states without a law](#).

Tips for Getting Your Letter Published

In general, newspapers and magazines will publish letters that are well-written and articulate, and that either represent specific points of view on an issue, or that thoughtfully analyze complex issues and events. Most publications stay away from publishing rants, although they may publish short-and-to-the-point letters that make the same points as a rant might, but in a much calmer and more rational way. **We strongly encourage you to use a respectful tone and to encourage people to be respectful when engaging legislators while also emphasizing the urgency of addressing this crisis.**

Here are a few helpful tips for getting your letters accepted by the editor (also see published examples below):

- Keep your letter under 300 words. Editors have limited space for printing letters, and some papers have stated policies regarding length (check the editorial page for this).
- Make sure your most important points are stated in the first paragraph. Editors may need to cut parts of your letter and they usually do so from the bottom up.
- If possible, refer to a recent event in your community or to a recent article – make a connection and make it relevant.
- Use local statistics and personal stories to better illustrate your point.
- Make sure you include your title as well as your name – it adds credibility, especially if it's relevant to the topic being discussed. If you are a program director, your title Editors may want to contact you, so include your phone number and email address.
- If your letter is not accepted the first time around, try again. You might submit a revised version with a different angle on the issue at a later date.

Once your draft is ready, consider outlets (see comprehensive list below) for your submission.

Where to Submit a Letter-to-the-Editor

Below is a list of contact information for submitting a letter-to-the-editor to newspapers in Pennsylvania. If you know of your local newspaper that's not on this list, find their website or contact them to learn the best way to submit a letter to the editor.

- [Allentown Morning Call](#)
- [Altoona Mirror](#)
- [Bedford Gazette](#)
- [Bloomsburg Press-Enterprise](#)
- [Bradford Era](#)
- [Bucks County Courier Times:](#)
send email to:
letters@phillyburbs.com
- [Carlisle Sentinel](#)
- [Chadds Ford Live](#)
- [Chambersburg Public Opinion](#)
- [Clearfield Progress](#)
- [Corry Journal](#)
- [Daily Local News \(Chester County\)](#)
- [Delaware County Daily Times](#)
- [Doylestown Intelligencer](#)
- [Du Bois Courier-Express](#)
- [Easton Express-Times](#)

- [Ellwood City Ledger](#)
- [Erie Times-News](#)
- [Gettysburg Times](#)
- [Greensburg Tribune-Review](#)
- [Hanover Evening Sun](#)
- [Harrisburg Patriot News](#)
- [Hazleton Standard-Speaker](#)
- [Huntingdon Daily News](#)
- [Indiana Gazette](#)
- [Johnstown Tribune-Democrat](#)
- [Kane Republican](#)
- [Lancaster Online](#)
- [Lansdale Reporter](#)
- [Lebanon Daily News](#)
- [Lehighon Times News](#)
- [Lewistown Sentinel](#)
- [Lock Haven Express](#)
- [Meadville Tribune](#)
- [Mechanicsburg Patriot-News](#)
- [Milton Standard-Journal](#)
- [Monessen Valley Independent](#)
- [New Castle News](#)
- [Oil City Derrick](#)
- [Oil City News-Herald](#)
- [PennLive.com](#)
- [Philadelphia Daily News](#)
- [Philadelphia Inquirer](#)
- [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#)
- [Pittsburgh Tribune-Review](#)
- [Pocono Record](#)
- [Punxsutawney Spirit](#)
- [Reading Eagle](#)
- [Ridgway Record](#)
- [Saint Marys Daily Press](#)
- [Sayre Morning Times](#)
- [Scranton Times-Tribune](#)
- [Sharon Herald](#)
- [Somerset Daily American](#)
- [State College Centre Daily Times](#)
- [Sunbury Daily Item](#)
- [Tarentum Valley News Dispatch](#)
- [Titusville Herald](#)
- [Towanda Daily & Sunday Review](#)
- [Uniontown Herald-Standard](#)
- [Wall Street Journal - Pittsburgh Bureau](#)
- [Warren Times Observer](#)
- [Washington Observer-Reporter](#)
- [Wayne Independent](#)
- [Wilkes-Barre Citizens Voice](#)
- [Wilkes-Barre Times Leader](#)
- [Williamsport Sun-Gazette](#)
- [York Daily Record](#)
- [York Dispatch](#)

Letter-to-the-Editor: Direct Email Addresses

- Advance of Bucks County advance@ingnews.com
- Allentown Morning Call letters@mcall.com
- Beaver County Times timesletters@timesonline.com
- Bucks County Courier Times letters@phillyburbs.com
- Butler Eagle letters@butlereagle.com
- Centre Daily Times cdtletters@centredaily.com
- Delaware County Times ldemeglio@delcotimes.com
- Doylestown Intelligencer intell_letters@phillyburbs.com
- Doylestown Patriot doyles@ingnews.com
- Erie Times-News letters@timesnews.com
- Express-Times <http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/opinion/sendaletter>



- Gettysburg Times editor@gburgtimes.com
- Harrisburg Patriot News letters@patriot-news.com
- Indiana Gazette mepetersen@indianagazette.net
- Johnstown Tribune-Democrat bwissinger@tribdem.com
- Kittanning Leader Times leadertimes@tribweb.com
- Lebanon Daily News <http://www.ldnews.com/letters>
- Philadelphia Daily News views@phillynews.com
- Philadelphia Gay News sarah@epgn.com
- Philadelphia Inquirer inquirer.letters@phillynews.com
- Philadelphia Tribune editorial@phila-tribune.com
- Philadelphia Weekly letters@philadelphiaweekly.com
- Pittsburgh City Paper cpotter@steelcitymedia.com
- Pittsburgh Post-Gazette letters@post-gazette.com
- Pittsburgh Tribune-Review opinion@tribweb.com
- Reading Eagle <http://readingeagle.com/section/editorial-contact>
- Scranton Times / The Tribune letters@TimesShamrock.com
- Warren Times-Observer editorial@timesobserver.com
- Yardley News yardley@ingnews.com
- York Daily Record <http://www.ydr.com/letters>
- York Dispatch letters@yorkdispatch.com