



CEASEFIREPA

FALL 2024

NEWSLETTER



CeaseFirePA convenes 150+ violence prevention leaders, survivors, and the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention at Pittsburgh's Acrisure Stadium. Aug 16, 2024.

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Photo Credit:
Dave Hochendoner

PA IS GETTING SAFER

In the last few months, we've partnered with the Eagles, Steelers, and White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention to highlight the lowest gun homicide rate in a decade in Philadelphia and Greater Pittsburgh. Statewide, murders are down 16%.

Just a few years ago, gun violence felt unavoidable in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Firearms became the #1 killer of children. Shootings at parks, parties, and bus stops destroyed families and created an atmosphere of widespread fear.

to live our lives free from gun violence, real, lifesaving change has happened before our very eyes. And it's because of our collective efforts.

Why? Our movement's advocacy has helped secure record investment in community-based violence prevention and intervention programs that are delivering life-saving results. The work being done day-in and day-out to address the root causes of violence and intervene at the community-level before a shot is fired – it's working.

While too many are still mourning and not enough of us feel truly safe

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LATEST NEWS

01

Ghost Gun Progress

The City of Reading is the third city we've worked with to ban ghost guns. The life-saving action comes after a Commonwealth Court ruling allowed local elected officials in York and Philadelphia to both pass similar ordinances.

02

Expert Testimony at House Hearing

In August, our Executive Director joined a panel of experts for a PA House Policy Committee hearing hosted by Reps. Friel-Otten and Bellmon. Our testimony informed policies to prevent shootings and lower their massive health and economic toll.

03

Good News From Supreme Court

In October, the U.S. Supreme Court tossed out a decision allowing 18-year-olds to openly carry guns during emergencies in Pennsylvania. There were no noted dissents in the high court's brief order. It lets stand a ban on people aged 18 to 20 carrying guns in public during a declared state of emergency.

04

Philadelphia Town Hall

Our Executive Director spoke at a Town Hall event hosted by Rep. Waxman, joining panelists on the front lines of city government, hospitals, and non-profits working to create a safer environment for all Philadelphians to live and thrive.

05

9th Highest Black Homicide Rate

We partnered with our allies at the Violence Policy Center to share the findings of their new report. It found that nearly 90% of Black homicide victims in 2022 were killed with a firearm, and that PA had the 9th highest rate of Black homicide victimization in the nation.



PA Office of Gun Violence Prevention

Our Executive Director and Director of Law & Policy joined the inaugural meeting of the PA Office of Gun Violence Prevention. The office is launching a whole-of-government response to addressing gun violence by enhancing data on what's working, increasing funding, and bringing together stakeholders across different forms of violence – including firearm suicides and gun violence among youth, intimate partners, and the community.



A Whole-of-Government Approach

We proudly joined President Biden, Vice President Harris, and scores of advocates from across the country at an event to celebrate the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention's achievements during its first year. The President signed new Executive Orders, including one to crack down on machine gun converters.

LEADERSHIP STAFF

ALLISON ANDERMAN
Director of Law & Policy

DR. JAY BRENNEMAN
Director of Firearm
Suicide Prevention Policy,
Stoneleigh Fellow

ASHLEIGH DEEMER
Campaign Director

ADAM GARBER
Executive Director

NELI SEPULVEDA
Deputy Director

BECKY WAINWRIGHT
Director of Development

Meet the rest of the team at: CeaseFirePA.org/about-us/team

BOARD LEADERSHIP

ALICIA ANDREWS
Chair

MARYBETH CHRISTIANSEN
Vice Chair

SHAKEETA PURDIE
Treasurer

MAYOR RICK GRAY
Secretary

The Goal: Save Lives Beyond Their Work In Healthcare Facilities

PA Health Professionals to End Gun Violence



Trauma surgeons repair catastrophic damage from bullets. Nurses provide care and support while healing. Pediatricians counsel parents on how to securely store firearms away from their children.

Public health professionals work tirelessly to save and care for gunshot wound patients – and they too often have to tell their loved ones they aren't coming home.

Now, CeaseFirePA has brought them together to advocate for preventative policy change to systemically address the main driver of our Commonwealth's gun violence epidemic: easy access to firearms. Our new coalition, PA Health Professionals to End Gun Violence, includes hundreds of doctors, nurses & other health professionals who will be at the vanguard of efforts to end this public health crisis once and for all in our Commonwealth.

The coalition – led by a steering committee representing a diversity of health professionals from across PA, and coordinated by our staff – launched this fall with a trio of events. We've already started our work to educate the public and lawmakers, and advocate for life-saving legislation that the General Assembly could pass today to make us all safer.



The coalition launches on Oct 8th with a series of press events featuring doctors, nurses, and other public health leaders in Philadelphia (top), Pittsburgh (middle), and at the Capitol in Harrisburg (bottom)

FOX 29
PHILADELPHIA

Doctors, nurses, health experts launch new PA task force to end gun violence

October 8, 2024

abc 27
WHTM

New coalition made up of Pennsylvania health officials addresses gun violence

October 8, 2024

THE TRACE

PA Health Care Workers Unite in Call for Stronger Gun Policies

October 8, 2024

LNP | LancasterOnline

I've operated on far too many kids harmed by guns

October 27, 2024

THE COALITION STEERING COMMITTEE

- Dr. Vivek Ashok, Pediatrician & Injury Prevention Researcher, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
- Dr. Bob Barraco, Trauma Surgeon, Lehigh Valley Health Network
- Ms. Debbie Cannon, Registered Nurse, Quality & Safety, Pittsburgh
- Dr. Gregory English, Trauma & General Surgeon, Erie
- Dr. Raquel Forsythe, Director of Trauma, General Surgeon, Pittsburgh
- Ms. Sunny Jackson, Registered Nurse, Injury Prevention Coordinator, Penn Medicine Trauma Center
- Dr. Elinore Kaufman, Trauma Surgeon, Penn Medicine
- Dr. Peri Levey, Resident Pediatrician, Pittsburgh
- Dr. Stanton Miller, Surgeon, Emergency Physician, Exec. Dir. of the Jefferson Center for Injury Research & Prevention, Jefferson Health
- Mr. Ben Reynolds, Physician Assistant, Trauma & Acute Care Surgery, Pittsburgh
- Dr. Shawn Safford, Pediatric Surgeon, Harrisburg, President of the American Trauma Society – PA Division
- Organizational Members:
 - American Trauma Society – PA
 - American Academy of Pediatrics – PA
 - Physicians for Social Responsibility – PA
 - PA Trauma Systems Foundation

Are you a health professional? Join the coalition!



PHOTO CREDIT: Charlie Galliher (top), Erin Ninehouser (middle) & PA House Democratic Caucus (bottom)

Shifting the Conversation on Firearm Suicide

Dr. Jay Breneman on PA's silent gun violence crisis



Firearm suicide accounts for over half of all gun deaths in PA, with rural areas bearing the brunt. The counties with the 2nd & 3rd highest gun death rates per capita over the last five years are rural Wayne & Carbon counties. Stigma and a veil of silence largely keep this crisis hidden and deprived of a prominent role in the conversation about gun violence prevention. We're changing that.

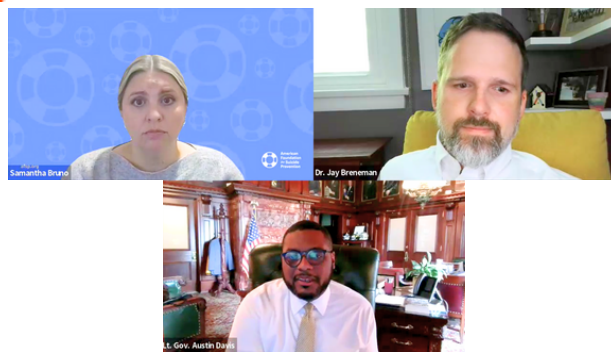
We've launched a new comprehensive approach to PA's firearm suicide crisis through a messaging, coalition, and policy strategy. Dr. Jay Breneman will lead this effort and integrate this work across our programs as our new Director of Firearm Suicide Prevention Policy, Stoneleigh Fellow.

Q: Why are you interested in this cutting-edge work in the gun violence prevention movement?

A: This role is a natural fit for me. I was raised in a rural, gun-owning household, and served for 6 1/2 years in the U.S. Army. On both of my deployments to Iraq, I knew soldiers who died in combat, and those who died by firearm suicide. When we came home, suicide never ceased being a major threat to the veteran community. It was all the ways I witnessed the trauma my fellow soldiers faced that led me to a career in social work and working with communities to forge a future with more support for one another. I understand first-hand how firearm suicide can tear apart families and communities, which is why I'm so passionate about shifting the narrative about this all-too-common tragedy.

Q: You joined the team as we were approaching Sept., National Suicide Prevention Month. How did you dive into the work at this critical moment?

A: Sept. 10th was also World Suicide Prevention Day, and this year's theme was "Changing the Narrative on Suicide" with the call to action being to "Start the Conversation." In light of this, we partnered with Lt. Gov. Austin Davis, who has championed gun violence prevention as one of his top issues, to shine more of a light on firearm suicide in PA – this pervasive, yet too often unspoken aspect of our gun violence epidemic. So we put together a lunch & learn webinar with him and our partner, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, with over 100 people tuning in live & more watching later on our Facebook page. These are the kinds of conversations we will continue to lead.



Lt. Gov Austin Davis and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's Eastern PA Director, Samantha Bruno, joined us for a lunch & learn webinar. Sept. 16, 2024.

Q: Looking forward, what are some of your top areas of focus?

A: I want to enhance our understanding of the perceptions around firearm suicide in rural communities through more events like the webinar with the Lt. Gov., an online survey, and focus group discussions. I'm looking for new ways to highlight key facts in the public conversation that show this crisis is too big to ignore, such as: having access to a firearm in the home triples the risk of dying by suicide. To do that, I'm building bridges with a diverse group of partners: everyday Pennsylvanians who care about suicide prevention, mental health professionals, faith leaders, and organizations that support farmers and rural communities. And all throughout those efforts, I'll be uplifting the voices of bereaved survivors and giving them a platform to tell their story. That's how we shift the narrative.

Q: How do you stay grounded doing this difficult work?

A: I'm so moved by the stories of those who lost a loved one to firearm suicide, and others who have dedicated their lives to ending this crisis. Many of them are living through that trauma every single day. I want to do everything I can to make sure their struggles and efforts will lead to real change, and so that others won't have to bear that burden.

TAKE OUR SURVEY

If you have lost a loved one to, or been affected by, firearm suicide please share your experience with us.

Help us lift the veil of silence, raise awareness, and prevent the next tragedy.



The Pennsylvanians Driving a Historic Drop in Shootings

In partnership with the Eagles, Steelers, and White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention, we convened 500 of the top experts across the Commonwealth. We brought together violence prevention experts, survivors, public health and law enforcement leaders, elected officials, and community leaders in Philadelphia at Lincoln Financial Field and in Pittsburgh at Acrisure Stadium. Here's some of what they said.

"PA experienced the nation's second-biggest decline in gun homicides last year. To use a football metaphor – we're in the red zone. Now is not the time to slow down. Now is the time to keep pushing forward. Because every life lost to gun violence is a tragedy."

- PA Lt. Governor Austin Davis

"Every week, every month, there's always a reminder of why we continue to do what we do. I'm just here to tell my story. We're excited about what the next 25 years will bring."

- Charlie Batch, Former Steelers Quarterback, Survivor, Founder of the "Best of the Batch" Foundation

"We will continue to be a part of these conversations to foster a safer and stronger community."

- Don Smolenski, President, Philadelphia Eagles

"In April of 2013, I got caught in a crossfire and the bullet hit two arteries and nearly took my life...From my hospital bed and that experience, I vowed personally to do all I can to prevent others from going through this. I'm so honored to work for an administration that truly believes in that, and doesn't just talk about it, but has put historic resources and policy efforts into achieving that dream."

- Greg Jackson, Deputy Director, White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention

"We're not just in the business of solving a crime. We're in the business of solving a public health crisis."

- Rob Wilcox, Deputy Director, White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention

"You see the numbers dropping, but it doesn't feel like there's a decrease in our office...because we're still getting calls every single day from a mother who's burying her children. We need to continue to keep our foot on the accelerator and get funding so we can continue to see the numbers go down."

- Dr. Dorothy Johnson-Speight, Exec. Dir., Mothers in Charge

"I found a home, because I didn't feel so alone. I was in the company of other women. Mothers in particular who knew what it was like to lose a child to homicide. I felt safe."

- Michelle Kerr-Spry, Member of Mothers in Charge



PHOTO CREDIT: Dave Hochendoner (top three) and Tom Weishaar (bottom two)

"Trauma-informed care: you're able to talk to someone, you're able to express what you're going through, so you're not thinking about retaliation... It's very important in giving the youth that open air: 'We're here. I understand what you're going through. Let's talk about it.'"

- Jaleel Williford, Participant in PowerCorpsPHL's Workforce Development Program

Keeping Kids Safe at School

This fall, 1.7 million Pennsylvania kids headed back to school. Parents are back to the routine of sending them off to learn, with all of the apprehension and excitement about the start of a new school year. But on top of that looms the unspoken question: will the kids come home at the end of the day, or will they be shot and end up in the hospital, or worse? Will kids come home and talk about the active shooter drills where they are taught to barricade rooms and be prepared to fight?

Amid efforts to require students to wear transparent backpacks, spend millions to “harden” schools, and even put more guns into classrooms by arming teachers – we launched a multi-pronged campaign to say clearly: none of this is keeping kids safe. We need real solutions that will stop the guns from getting into the wrong hands in the first place.

Convening Local Leaders to Drive Change

We hosted a series of roundtable discussions highlighting the importance of preventing gun violence in and around schools, rather than just reacting to it. These roundtables featured expert panelists from each community, including teachers, students, law enforcement, violence prevention workers, even a school counselor who survived a school shooting. We gathered in-person in Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Allegheny counties, and also held a statewide virtual conversation. The roundtables got broad local news coverage to amplify our message.



Meredith Elizalde



Abby Gillette Campbell

Watch their stories at: DeadlyByDesign.org

New Survivor Stories

We continue to uplift the stories of gun violence survivors through our video storytelling project, “Deadly by Design: Facing the Truth About Gun Violence in PA.” We premiered two new stories featuring women who experienced great loss from preventable gun violence in schools. Meredith Elizalde lost her only son, Nick, during a shooting at Roxborough High School in Philadelphia in September 2022 – it could’ve been stopped with a law requiring background checks on ammunition. And Abby Gillette Campbell lost her father, John (a teacher), in a school shooting at the Parker Middle School dance in Edinboro in 1998 – it might not have happened if PA had a safe firearm storage law at the time.

“Gun violence has been a part of my life [in Philly] for as long as I can remember. Even though gun violence is an ongoing national issue, I’m glad to be attending school in Connecticut. And all the while pushing my home state’s lawmakers to take urgent action to make my friends and family back home safer.”

- Cayla Waddington (lifelong Philadelphia resident, freshman at Yale University, and a youth advisor on the CeaseFirePA board) in an op-ed published in the USA Today Network

Donor Spotlight

Dr. Ken Levin is a pediatrician, father, and activist who commits his time, giving, and the power of his voice to speak up to make Pennsylvanians safe from gun violence. Gun shot wounds are the leading cause of death for PA children – more than car crashes, cancer, or overdoses. Ken Levin shared why he's not merely accepting that as a fact of life.

Q: As a pediatrician, what are you observing about children today?

A: Parents come to me for advice about toilet training, sleep, screen time, car seats. I was asked recently: "How do I help my 7-year-old who is acting out in school and home, and refusing to manage her type 1 diabetes?" What prompted this question? The girl's father had been shot and killed. Easy access to a firearm robbed her of her father, and it is no wonder this child is struggling.

Gun violence is not just an issue for individual families. It is a massive public health issue that permeates our lives every day. I take care of a lot of children struggling with anxiety. Kids already anxious about going to school must deal with the very real fear of a school shooting. Absences mount, grades slide, moods darken, and kids contemplate ending their own lives. Ready access to a gun can quickly transform these thoughts into reality, with devastating efficiency.

Pennsylvania needs kids and teachers and staff to feel safe at school, in playgrounds, and at football games. The chronic stress of worrying about gun violence drives kids to lose interest, disengage, or lash out.

Q: What would you say to others who care about this issue?

A: I am a pediatrician, and an expert in my field, but I am still just one person demanding action from our legislators and trying to take on a system of gun violence. I know I'm doing my part, but our real power comes from joining together, not from any one individual. So if you haven't already, join me in taking a stand against gun violence: participate in our digital advocacy actions, come out to our events, and consider a special gift this holiday season.

We are a great state, full of young children. We can and must do more. Join me and get involved!



Q: Why do you donate your time, energy, and money to CeaseFirePA?

A: CeaseFirePA is a well-organized, effective organization. I am very impressed by how the team works tirelessly to reduce gun violence, uniting diverse groups throughout Pennsylvania and empowering people to work together to reach shared goals. I saw this firsthand as one of the over 700 Pennsylvanians at the Capitol for this year's advocacy day, and at a roundtable discussion on school safety in Pittsburgh's North Hills.

This election season, CeaseFirePA PAC endorsed gun safety candidates. Through CeaseFirePA PAC, I got to know Hadley Haas and her campaign team. Walking door to door in Emsworth, Sewickley Heights, and McDonald I could stride confidently knowing I was promoting a candidate who cared about her community, and who'd be passionate about advancing life-saving legislation. And more broadly – by investing my money in CeaseFirePA PAC, I helped to make it clear to legislators that if you vote against gun safety bills, your job will be on the line.



**DONATE
TODAY TO
POWER THE
MOVEMENT!**



Pennsylvania Citizen
555 Commonwealth Rd
Harrisburg, PA 17120


LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

With a second Trump presidency looming, we're all feeling uncertain, anxious, and despondent that we'll face unprecedented federal attacks on our gun safety system as the NRA goes back into the White House.

But here in Pennsylvania, we have a plan to resist – and move forward. We've held on to our slim gun safety majority in the PA House of Representatives. Not a single State Rep. who voted for gun safety bills this session lost their re-election. With a one-vote majority, it won't be easy, but we'll bring the fight back to Harrisburg, hold the line against a pro-gun Trump administration, and build on our recent progress.

Imagine just what we've accomplished in the last year. A historic drop in gun violence because of investments you helped win. More votes on gun safety bills in the PA House than ever before – and three passed with bipartisan support. A new public health coalition. Survivors shared how the system is Deadly By Design. Protests outside the offices of those who want to continue gun violence. We did it together. Congratulations.

As we look ahead, Pennsylvania will need to expand investments in violence prevention. We'll need to hold gun dealers accountable as the ATF is undermined. We'll need to advance life-saving policies as Congress tries to undo the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. We'll take each step together, because too many of us have lost someone to gun violence. The road to end this crisis got a little bit longer, but together we can travel it quickly to ensure everyone lives free from gun violence.



Thank You,
Adam Garber

P.S. Please consider making a special donation this holiday season to keep up this good work and save more lives.

QUESTIONS?

Email: member@ceasefirepa.org

TAKE A STAND

Visit CeaseFirePA.org to learn more

