

DATE: April 13, 2023

RE: Waiting periods in H230

Waiting periods for the possession of firearms are a commonsense way to prevent impulsive, volatile acts of gun violence. By delaying immediate access to firearms, waiting periods create an important “cooling off” period that can help prevent impulsive acts of gun violence, including gun homicides and suicides.

The immediate purchase and acquisition of a gun allows people to act on temporary emotions and impulses, which can increase the risk of both gun suicide and gun homicide.

- Suicide attempts are often impulsive, singular episodes that involve little planning. Many studies suggest that most suicide survivors contemplated their actions for only a brief period of time—often less than 24 hours—before making a suicide attempt.¹
- Similarly, studies suggest that some of the factors that incite violence against others, such as anger and rage, can be short-lived.²

Waiting period laws, which create a buffer between the time of gun purchase and gun acquisition, can help to prevent impulsive acts of gun violence. In particular, studies suggest that waiting period laws prevent firearm suicides and firearm homicides.

- Studies suggest that waiting period laws are associated with reduced rates of firearm suicide.³ By one estimation, waiting period laws may reduce firearm suicide rates by 7–11%.⁴

¹ Eberhard A. Deisenhammer, et al., “The Duration of the Suicidal Process: How Much Time is Left for Intervention Between Consideration and Accomplishment of a Suicide Attempt?,” *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 70, no. 1 (2008); T. R. Simon, et al., “Characteristics of Impulsive Suicide Attempts and Attempters,” *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 32 no. 1 (Suppl.) (2001): 49–59; Catherine W. Barber and Matthew J. Miller, “Reducing a Suicidal Person’s Access to Lethal Means of Suicide: A Research Agenda,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 47, no. 3 (2014): S264–S272. See also, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Means Matter, “Impulsivity and Crises,” <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/impulsivity>.

² J. Davidson, K. R. Scherer, and H. H. Goldsmith, “The Role of Affect in Decision Making,” *Handbook of Affective Sciences* (2003): 619–642. See also, e.g., David Card and Gordon B. Dahl, “Family Violence and Football: The Effect of Unexpected Emotional Cues on Violent Behavior,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126, no. 1 (2011): 103–143.

³ Michael Luca, Deepak Malhotra, and Christopher Poliquin, “Handgun Waiting Periods Reduce Gun Deaths,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 46 (2017): 12162–12165; Michael D. Anestis and Joye C. Anestis, “Suicide Rates and State Laws Regulating Access and Exposure to Handguns,” *American Journal of Public Health* 105, no. 10 (2015): 2049–2058.

⁴ Michael Luca, Deepak Malhotra, and Christopher Poliquin, “Handgun Waiting Periods Reduce Gun Deaths,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 46 (2017): 12162–12165.



At present, the shortest state-level waiting period is three days; the majority of waiting period laws require buyers to wait 7 to 10 days before taking possession of a gun they have purchased. Research suggests that longer waiting periods may be more effective.

- One study found that the presence of any waiting period was associated with decreases in firearm suicides, but longer waiting periods showed some evidence of larger effects.⁵
- A comparison study similarly found that the longer a state's waiting period, the lower the firearm suicide rate and the proportion of suicides resulting from firearms.⁶

⁵ Griffin Edwards, et al., "Looking Down the Barrel of a Loaded gun: The Effect of Mandatory Handgun Purchase Delays on Homicide and Suicide," *The Economic Journal* 128, no. 616 (2018): 3117-3140.

⁶ Michael D. Anestis and Joye C. Anestis, "Suicide Rates and State Laws Regulating Access and Exposure to Handguns," *American Journal of Public Health* 105, no. 10 (2015): 2049–2058.