

Advocacy Success! Expanded Background Checks for Gun Sales

Angie Howard-McParland, Mercy Justice Team

In our line of work, it can be easy to wonder if all of those emails, phone calls, protests, and meetings have any effect on our elected officials and make a difference in people's lives. Often, the timeline between advocacy, legislation, and concrete change for people in need is long and difficult to trace, so it's exciting to share about the recent development in gun violence prevention by the Biden administration to expand background checks on gun sales that will most certainly save lives.

In September 2023, we issued a Mercy Justice Action Alert asking our advocates to submit a public comment to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) that supported a proposed rule change to close a loophole on background checks for gun sales. Prior to this rule change, private, unlicensed sellers could privately deal firearms at gun shows, at home, or even online without participating in background checks. Estimates show that nearly 1 in 5 guns were sold without a background check in this manner.

This new rule, which was made possible by 2022's Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, clarifies who exactly is "engaged in the business" of dealing in firearms and therefore is required to obtain a license to do so and submit to the background check system.

Following the public comment period where nearly 400,000 comments were submitted, the Biden administration announced that they were approving the rule, thus subjecting more than 20,000 gun dealers to ATF oversight and required background checks for purchases. Closing this loophole will save lives by disrupting the flow of illegal guns to those with dangerous histories, youth, and trafficking of weapons across state lines and out of the country.

Thank you to all of our Mercy advocates who took the time to submit a comment to the ATF and to share this and any of our Mercy Justice action alerts – your advocacy does make a difference in gun violence prevention and so many other issues related to our Critical Concerns.