

Combatting Gun Violence in New Jersey



In New Jersey, Governor Phil Murphy and Attorney General Gurbir Grewal are leading a comprehensive, statewide effort to reduce gun deaths—one that pairs the latest evidence-based policing strategies with innovative, community-based prevention programs. The approach is simple: Treat the root causes of violence. Keep guns away from those most likely to harm others. And take swift action against those who break the law. Taken together, these efforts are making New Jersey a national model for tackling this public health crisis.

What makes New Jersey different?

Here are four key initiatives that are changing the way we think about gun violence:

Interrupting the cycles of violence. In 2019, New Jersey launched the country's most ambitious statewide effort to stop retaliatory gun violence before it starts, committing \$20 million to fund "hospital-based violence interruption programs" (HVIPs) in nine locations across the state. Using federal grant funds available under the Victims of Crime Act, these programs partner local hospitals with community-based organizations to assist victims of gun violence in high-crime areas.

Keeping unregistered, untraceable guns out of New Jersey. One of the most effective ways to keep guns away from felons, terrorists, and domestic abusers is by requiring a universal background check before a potential buyer can purchase a firearm, and New Jersey has among the country's strongest programs for doing so. Recently, however, criminals have tried to evade background checks by obtaining unregistered guns on the internet, either by downloading computer codes for 3D printable codes or purchasing partially complete "ghost guns" and assembling the weapons themselves. These weapons pose a particular threat to law enforcement officers, and the New Jersey AG's Office has pioneered some of the nation's first enforcement actions against these online traffickers, imposing strict civil and criminal penalties on those who bring unregistered and untraceable weapons into the Garden State.

Sharing intelligence on firearms used in crimes. When law enforcement officers seize a firearm that was used in a crime, they want to know as much about the weapon as possible: who bought it, when was it bought, and were any other guns purchased at the same time? Under the supervision of the Attorney General's Office, the New Jersey State Police has built the country's most comprehensive statewide database on "crime guns," creating an invaluable tool for criminal investigators seeking to trace illegal firearms to their source (which, more than 80 percent of the time, is located outside the state). To help educate the public, State Police now publishes monthly data online through a program known as "[GunSTAT](#)," which helps draw attention to the problem of interstate gun trafficking, as well as the states and manufacturers responsible.

Targeting the most violent criminals and the weapons they use. Studies show that most gun violence can be traced back to a relatively small number of repeat offenders. The New Jersey AG's Office has partnered with federal, state, and local law enforcement to identify gang leaders, weapons traffickers, and other high-risk targets, and hold them accountable when they violate the law. These efforts have resulted in landmark prosecutions against some of the state's most dangerous criminal organizations, especially in the cities of Newark, Jersey City, Paterson, Trenton, Camden, and Atlantic City.

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