

Reducing the Risk of Gun Violence in Bloomington

2025 Research and Recommendations from the City of Bloomington, IL,
Special Commission for Safe Communities

Executive Summary

Our commission was established as an advisory body to the Bloomington City Council, to help enhance community safety by reducing the risk of gun violence. Over two years, the commission gathered data from community organization presentations and research, identifying patterns and developing recommendations.

Gun violence takes many forms. Most deaths are from suicide or shootings that were not pre-meditated. Yet, many shooters demonstrate warning signs beforehand and/or they have inappropriate access to guns. To help address the warning signs of gun violence and limit inappropriate access to guns, our committee recommends that the City of Bloomington facilitate measures detailed in [Section 3](#) to:

1. **Expand Community Group Collaboration:** Establish a permanent task force coordinating existing groups around gun violence prevention research and action.
2. **Promote Gun Security:** Expand secure storage education, gun lock distribution, safe giveaways and buyback programs, while supporting FOID card revocation enforcement.
3. **Gather Youth Perspectives:** Conduct comprehensive surveys to understand youth experiences with violence and gather their recommendations.
4. **Support Suicide Prevention:** Target high-risk populations with information about secure storage, firearm restraining orders, the 988 Crisis Lifeline, and veteran support.
5. **Strengthen Domestic Violence Programs:** Improve protective order enforcement, survivor outreach, multi-disciplinary working groups, and consistent prosecution.
6. **Fund School Programming:** Fund violence prevention programs, Social Emotional Learning, third spaces, parent education on tech, and alternatives to punitive approaches.
7. **Invest in Mental Health Programs:** Expand veteran services and connections with military families, coordinating with mental health committees and programs.
8. **Continue the Special Commission for Safe Communities:**

Establish permanent oversight through expansion of existing city committees or creation of new structures to implement, monitor, and update these recommendations over time.

These interconnected recommendations reflect that effective gun violence prevention must address many factors in a coordinated effort. This effort should be viewed as a community investment, not simply a cost.

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Our Mission

The Special Commission for Safe Communities is hereby established as an advisory body to the Bloomington City Council to help enhance community safety by reducing gun violence.

1. **Collect, evaluate, and assess data** on gun violence (GV) and weapons violations within the Bloomington area.
2. **Identify patterns and underlying causes** of gun violence (GV) and weapons violations within the Bloomington area.
3. **Provide specific recommendations** about how the City might address identified issues.

Chairperson Denton presented an interim progress report to the city council during the committee of the Whole meeting on August 19, 2024.

1. Data

Note: This report uses the word "gun" in reference to firearms, and only firearms.

1a. Gun Violence Across Communities

Locally

Shootings in Bloomington

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025*
Confirmed shots fired	27	31	42	30	37	15
Persons shot	11	12	15	7	4	7
Persons killed	1	3	5	0	0	4

*through Sep 15, 2025 (BPD Intelligence Jack McQueen)

Staff Liaison Kiel Nowers shared a three-year summary of illegal gun activity in Bloomington, which was compiled by Bloomington Police Department (BPD) Crime Intelligence and Analysis (CIAU) Supervisor Jack McQueen. The information provided by CIAU Supervisor McQueen covers the years 2022-2024:

- Bloomington has experienced an average of 36 shooting incidents per year. The year 2024 had the most with 42 incidents.
- Bloomington has averaged 8.6 persons shot per year.
- Average age of known shooters: 22 years
- Average age of victim: 18 years
- Over 95% of all gun-related incidents involved large-caliber weapons, with 9mm and .40 being the calibers used most.
- There has been an increase in the number of rounds fired per shooting incident.
- BPD has seen an increase in the number of shootings by fully automated handguns. This syncs with the increase in possession of Glock handguns, which can be easily converted to be fully automatic using inexpensive parts.
- The incidence of arrestees/suspects in gun-related incidents who are African American males remains higher than other race/sex combinations. Of the incidents involving African American males, the age range for both suspects and victims have mostly between the ages of 18-22 years.
- Gang-motivated shootings are less common than in the previous 10-year period.
- Youths who appear focused on first-time acquisition and use of a gun
- In many cases, youth have been shooting at property, not at other people.

Jack McQueen (BPD Intelligence) said that he thinks shot spotter technology is not necessary in Bloomington Normal, and such technology raises privacy concerns.

Gun Theft

Residential burglaries followed by vehicle burglaries remain the most prevalent ways of obtaining an illegally possessed gun. (BPD Assistant Chief Aaron Veerman Nov 28, 2023)

Location of Stolen Firearms	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Residence - Private	9	5	18	2	34
Apartment	6	11	12	4	33
Vehicle	4	1	3	4	12
Apartment -- Parking Lot	1	2	1		4
Driveway -- Residential	1	3			4
Street	1	2			3
Business Place -- Commercial (Other Than Those Listed)		3			3
Unknown			1	1	2
Garage -- Residential		1	1		2
Motel/Hotel		2			2
Parking Lot - General Use			1		1
Bus		1			1
Train Car				1	1
Mobile Home - permanent	1				1
Total	23	31	37	12	103

Community Surveys on Gun Violence

On July 9, 2024, Bloomington Police Chief Simington spoke to The Pantagraph about [investigative technology related to gun violence and a community survey showing that gun violence is one of the top concerns in community surveys](#). (Chairperson Denton Jul 23, 2024)

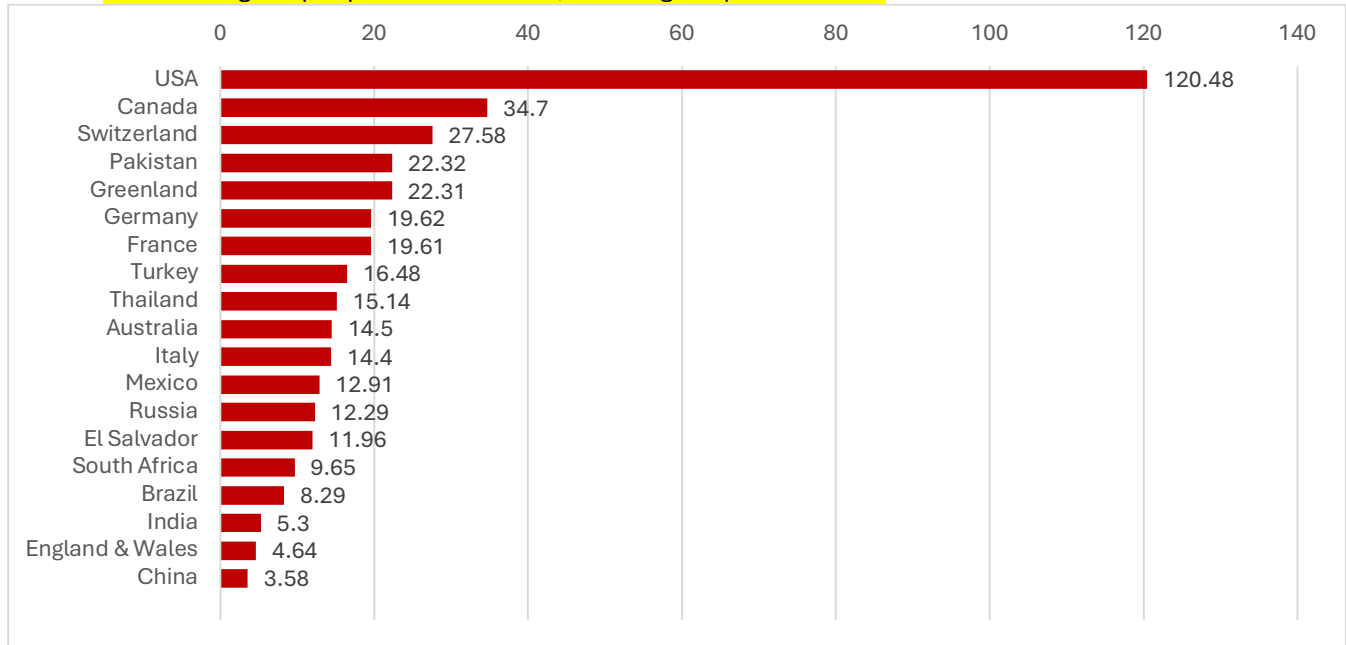
FOID cards

- Bloomington City Council approved an agreement for the Bloomington Police Department to join the Illinois State Police Violent Crime Intelligence Task Force to increase cooperation with Illinois State Police to seize guns from people whose FOID cards have expired. Chief Jamal Simington reported that about 300 Bloomington residents have their FOID cards revoked each year. (Chairperson Denton Mar 24, 2025)
- Statewide, approximately 112,000 people have had their FOID cards revoked. Of those 112,000 FOID card revocations in Illinois, approximately 84,000 people (75%) have not subsequently turned in any guns. The number of revoked FOID cards has been trending upward. (Chairperson Denton read a report by Sheriff Dart out of Cook County)

Nationally

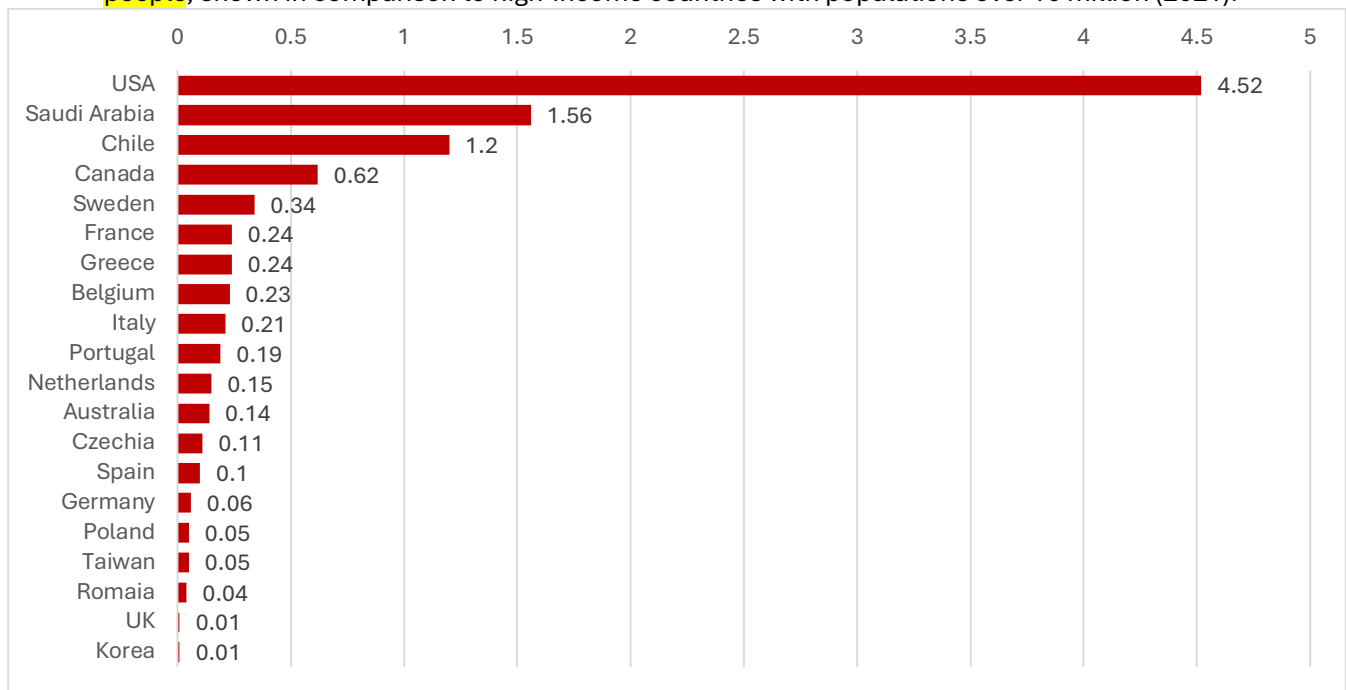
Civilian guns per 100 people

Citing data from the [Small Arms Survey](#), [Ammo.com](#) said “estimates based on a 2017 survey suggest that there are 1.2 guns per person in the U.S. However, more recent estimates show at least one million firearms have been purchased in the U.S. per month since March of 2020. **A more realistic estimate in 2025 is 1.5 guns per person in the U.S., or 1.79 guns per U.S. adult.**”



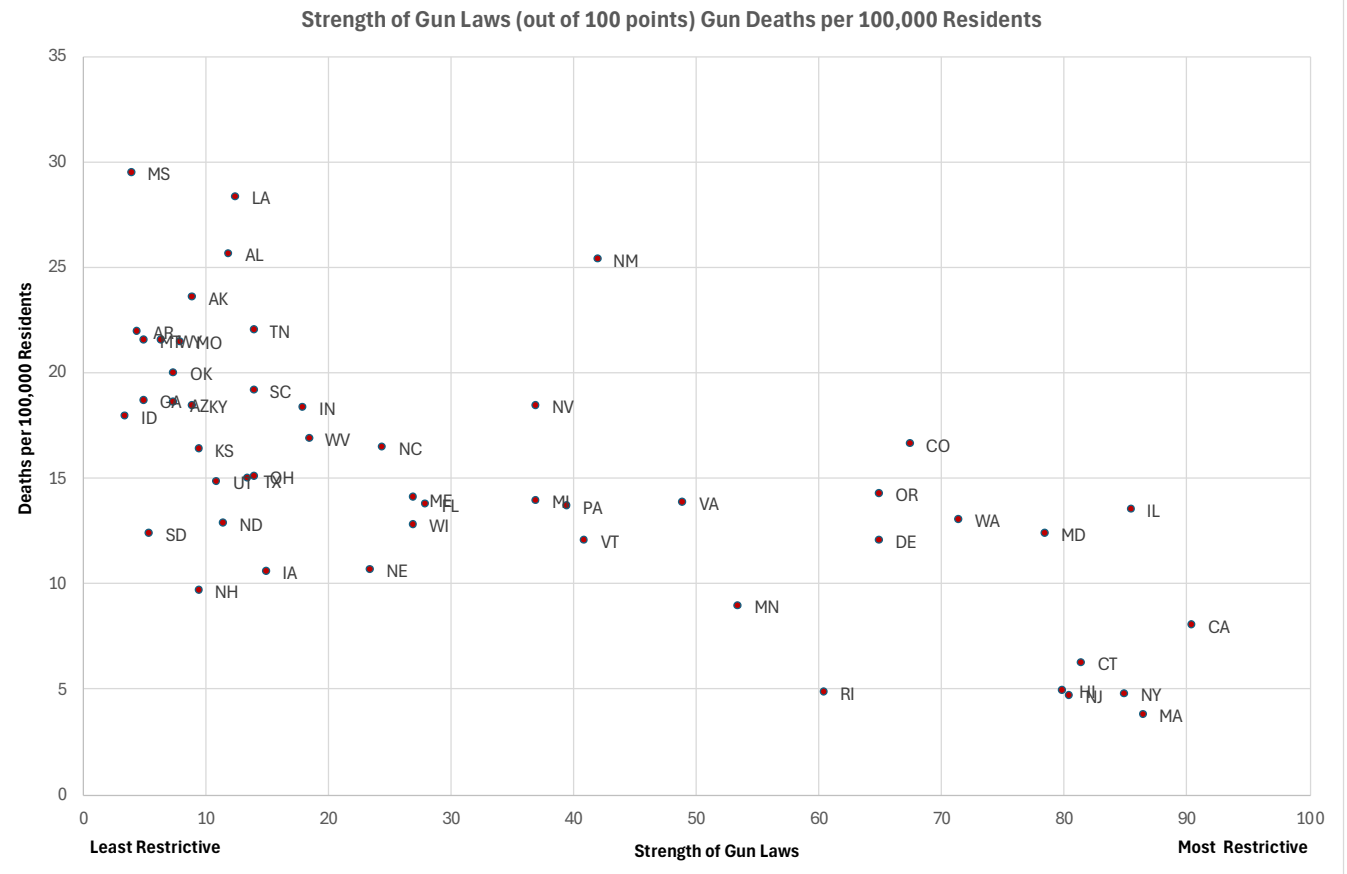
Gun homicides per 100,000 people

The [Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation](#) estimated the US has **4.52 gun homicides per 100,000 people**, shown in comparison to high-income countries with populations over 10 million (2021).



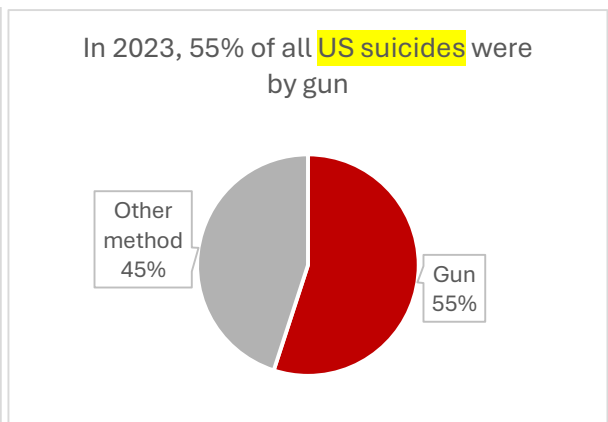
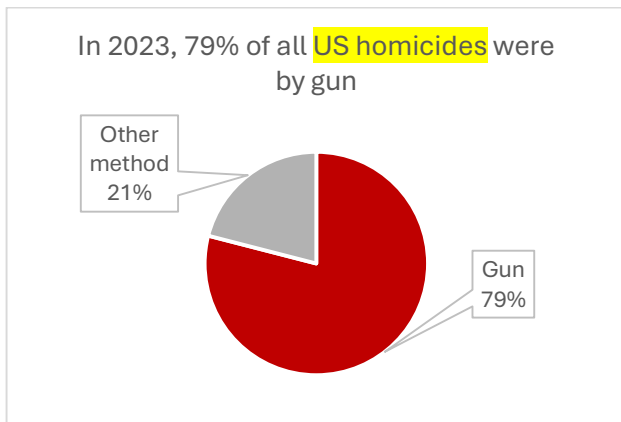
Gun Deaths per 100,000 US State Residents vs Strength of State Gun Laws (100-point scale)

The following plot chart combines data from the [2025 Everytown Gun Law Ranking with the CDC WONDER 2023 state gun death rates](#) (compiled Jun 2025).



Percentage of US homicides and suicides involving guns in 2023

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health concluded that in 2023 **guns were used for the majority of homicides and suicides** in the US. This is consistent other years in [Pew Research data](#).



Circumstances of homicide (including all means)

The [Council on Criminal Justice Homicide Trends Report](#) determined that **homicide committed during felony acts (such as robbery, rape, or drug trafficking) account for a minority of homicide cases**, based on Jacob Kaplan's concatenated files on Uniform crime reporting program data - supplementary homicide reports, 1976-2022.

Ammunition

"The tissue trauma caused by bullets involves multiple factors, including the velocity, caliber, mass, design of the projectile, entrance profile (how the bullet enters the body), distance traveled and the tumble or yaw within the body, the biologic characteristics of the structures hit, and the mechanisms of tissue disruption (e.g., stretching, tearing, crushing, cavitation, shock waves). The high-muzzle velocity bullets typically utilized in mass shootings create permanent and temporary impact cavities upon penetration. ...

We need to apply public health principles to bullets, similar to how we conduct research and implement programs for infectious diseases. We need public policies to diminish the risk of bullets from entering humans by treating them as agents of injury and death, not as inert objects that do no harm."

(Source: [Bullets as Pathogen](#), Eric W. Fleegler, MD, MPH et al, American Medical Association, Dec 9 2024, sent to the commission at the request of Chairperson Denton Jan 8, 2025)

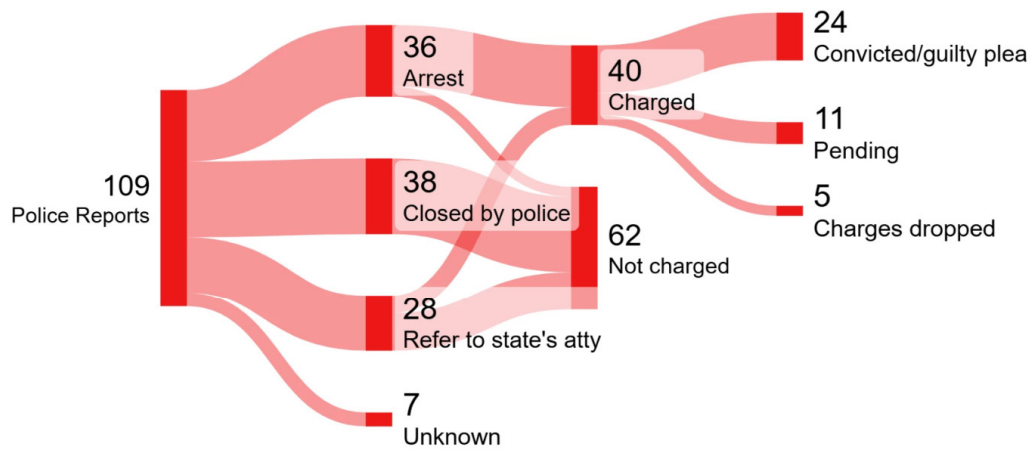
1b. Gun-based Domestic Violence

Locally

The [Illinois Commission Against Domestic Violence](#) reports that 120 people died in 94 separate domestic violence (DV) incidents in the state of Illinois in 2023, an increase of 110% over 2022. Of the 120 deaths, 56% of victims were female. Victims range in age from under one year to 86 years.

- Guns were the means of death in 68% of the incidents, indicating that removal of guns is a life-saving effort. Protective orders can also play a role in preventing IPV/DV if they're enforced (Beichner-Thomas presentation).
- Of the 120 deaths, 13 were individuals who killed and then turned the guns on themselves taking their own life.
- Bloomington had three DV incidents (one per year) 2022-2024 where a gun was involved, regardless of the outcome. With DV being one of the leading calls for service reasons, guns involved in DVs is rare in Bloomington. In none of these three incidents was the gun fired.
- Bloomington suicide/murders are considered incidents of DV. They included two incidents, a double murder in 2022 and a triple murder in 2025.

Outcomes of Order of Protection Violations in McLean County



Made at SankeyMATIC.com

Ryan Denham / WGLT

A look at the outcomes of 109 police reports involving a potential order of protection violation in McLean County during the first half of 2024. WGLT reviewed each police report and traced the case through the criminal justice system.

(Source: WGLT, presented by Commissioner Selman)

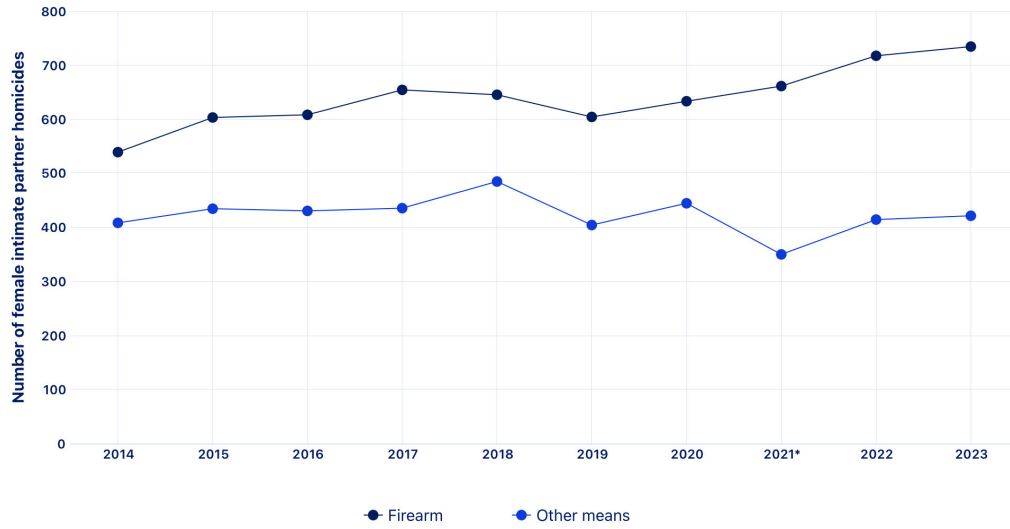
Nationally

In the US, in 2023, 735 women were killed by domestic partners using guns, compared to 421 by all other means combined. The Rockefeller Institute determined that, in violent relationships where an abusive man has access to a gun, there is a **400% greater risk of him killing his female partner**. The institute also determined that **nearly 25 million US adults have experienced nonfatal gun-related abuse** by an intimate partner. (Beichner-Thomas presentation)

- During the three years that led up to intimate partner homicides in the US, police were in contact with female victims in 91% of the cases. (Koppa & Messing, 2021)
- Approximately half of all women killed in the US are killed by a current/former intimate partner, more than half are by gun. (Websdale et al., 2019, Zeoli, 2018)
- An average of 76 women are shot and killed by an intimate partner per month. (Everytown)
- States with the highest rates of gun ownership have a 65% higher rate of domestic gun homicide than states with the lowest rates of gun ownership. (Everytown)
- Black and American Indian/Alaska Native women are victims of intimate partner homicide at the highest rates. (Everytown)
- Maternal intimate partner violence prevalence is higher in homes with loaded guns. (Burrell et al., 2021)
- Most mass shootings in the U.S. between 2014 and 2019 are related to DV. (Geller et al., 2021)
- Restraining order recipients (California) wanted guns removed and felt safer. (Vittes et al., 2013)
- Researchers conducting content analyses of state laws on gun removal in OP cases find important implications with implementation. Research shows a reduction in IPH when gun prohibitions are applied to nonspecific violent misdemeanors (not DV misdemeanors). (Lynch & Logan, 2020; Zeoli et al., 2018)
- IPV victims (New York, California) perceive that laws designed to disarm abusers are poorly implemented/failed to inform victims when guns were surrendered/confiscated. (Webster et al., 2010)

Intimate partner homicides of women by guns

[Everytown](#) data from Nov 11, 2024 showed that intimate partner homicides of women by guns are rising.



*Reporting affected by COVID pandemic in 2021

1c. Gun-based Suicides

Locally

McLean County has had an average of 21.7 suicides per year over the past 10 years. Most suicide cases in McLean County are mainly middle-age white males. (McLean County Coroner Dr. Yoder)

	2025 (on 8/27)	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Total Suicides	10	20	26	17	29	24	18	16	19	25	23
# of Males	8	12	20	15	21	22	13	8	14	16	15
# of Females	2	8	6	2	8	2	5	8	5	9	8
Youngest	19 yr	17 yr	18 yr	26 yr	17 yr	10 yr	26 yr	16 yr	14 yr	21 yr	15 yr
Oldest	86 yr	84 yr	82 yr	84 yr	84 yr	93 yr	66 yr	86 yr	95 yr	85 yr	78 yr
Average Age	55 yr	42 yr	45 yr	45 yr	41 yr	42 yr	47 yr	52 yr	46 yr	46 yr	48 yr
Demographics											
White	8	17	22	14	25	19	16	15	19	22	22
Black	2	2	2	2	2	5	2			1	1
Hispanic			2		2					2	
Biracial								1			
Other		1		1							
Veteran of Armed Forces			2	2	1		2	1	3	1	7
Highest Level of Education											
8th Grade or Less		1	2			1			1	1	
9th - 12th Grade, No Diploma		1	1	1	4	3	3	1	1	2	1
High School Diploma	6	5	9	7	11	9	9	4	10	12	12
Some College, No Degree	1	2	4	2	6	5		6	4	2	2
Associate's Degree	1	3	3		1	2	3	1		1	1
Bachelor's Degree		5	5	5	6	3	2	3	3	4	4
Master's Degree		2		1	1	1	1	1		1	2
Doctorate Degree	2		1	1						2	1
Unknown		1	1								
Marital Status											
Never Married	4	10	9	5	17	14	5	8	6	10	9
Married	2	4	7	10	7	7	7	4	6	9	8
Married but Separated										1	
Divorced	1	6	9	1	2	2	6	4	5	4	5
Widowed	3		1	1	3	1			2	1	1

Of the suicides in McLean County, an average of 36% of them have been by gun over the past 10 years (McLean County Coroner Dr. Yoder and chief forensic pathologist Dr. Scott Denton)

	Percentage of Suicides by Gunshot	Percentage of Suicides by Other Means
2015	26%	74%
2016	24%	76%
2017	37%	63%
2018	32%	81%
2019	39%	61%
2020	63%	37%
2021	41%	59%
2022	24%	76%
2023	62%	38%
2024	20%	80%
2025*	44%	56%

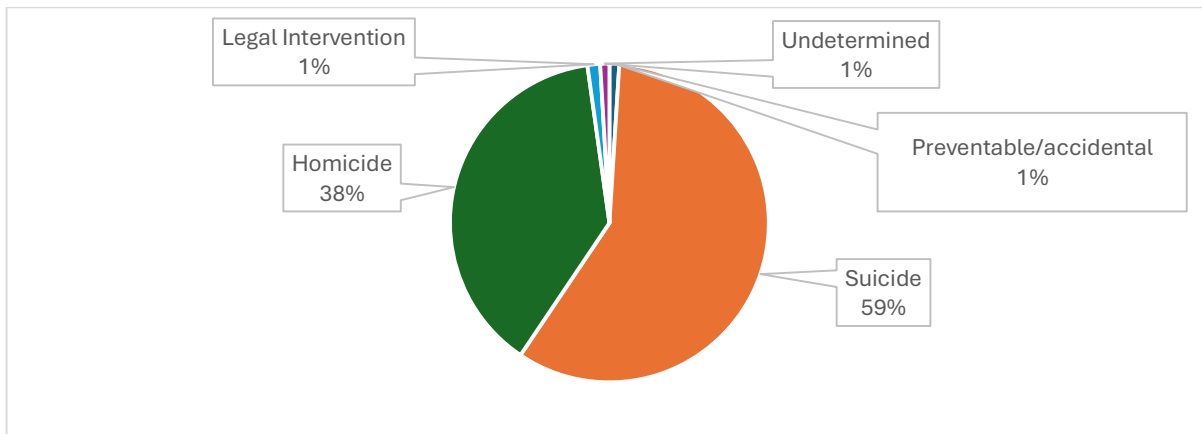
* on 9/26

Nationally

In the US, gun suicides have been trending upward for two decades. They have consistently accounted for more gun deaths than homicides, since at least 1979. Gun homicides have fluctuated, with a significant increase during the COVID-19 pandemic but a decrease afterward. ([Pew Research](#), [CDC](#), [Kaiser Family Foundation](#)) (chart [Pew Research](#))

Gun-related suicide deaths in the US (2023)

The [National Safety Council](#) concluded that suicide cases accounted for most gun deaths in the US in 2023.



Source notes: Data from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Multiple Cause of Death 1999-2023 on CDC WONDER Online Database, as compiled from data provided by the 57 vital statistics jurisdictions through the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program.

Lethality

Based on the suicide acts that resulted in death or hospitalization, guns were found to be the most lethal method (CFR:89.7%), followed by hanging/suffocation (84.5%), drowning (80.4%), gas poisoning (56.6%), jumping (46.7%), drug/liquid poisoning (8.0%) and cutting (4.0%). The rank of the lethality for different methods remained relatively stable across study setting, sex and age group. Method-specific CFRs for males and females were similar for most suicide methods, while method-CFRs were specifically higher in older adults. ([Science Direct](#)) Lethality matters, as a global study found that the risk of suicide in the 12 months after an index attempt was 1.6% (CI 1.2–2.4) and 3.9% (CI 3.2–4.8) after 5 years. ([Public Library of Science](#))

Accessibility

It's important to note that not all gun suicides are enacted by the gun owner. For adolescents, a seminal case-control study estimated that living in a home with (vs without) a gun was associated with a fourfold increase in the risk of death by suicide. ([British Medical Journal](#))

Veterans

In 2022, the most recent year for full data, there were 6,407 veteran suicides reported and ~71% involved guns (likely more suicides unreported)

- The rate of suicide among US veterans is 34.7 per 100,000, compared to 17.1 per 100,000 for non-veterans. ([Suicide Among Veterans, Rand Corporation](#))
- McLean County has ~6,533 veterans (~4.9% of county population)

1d. Gun Violence Risks for Youth and Schools

Locally

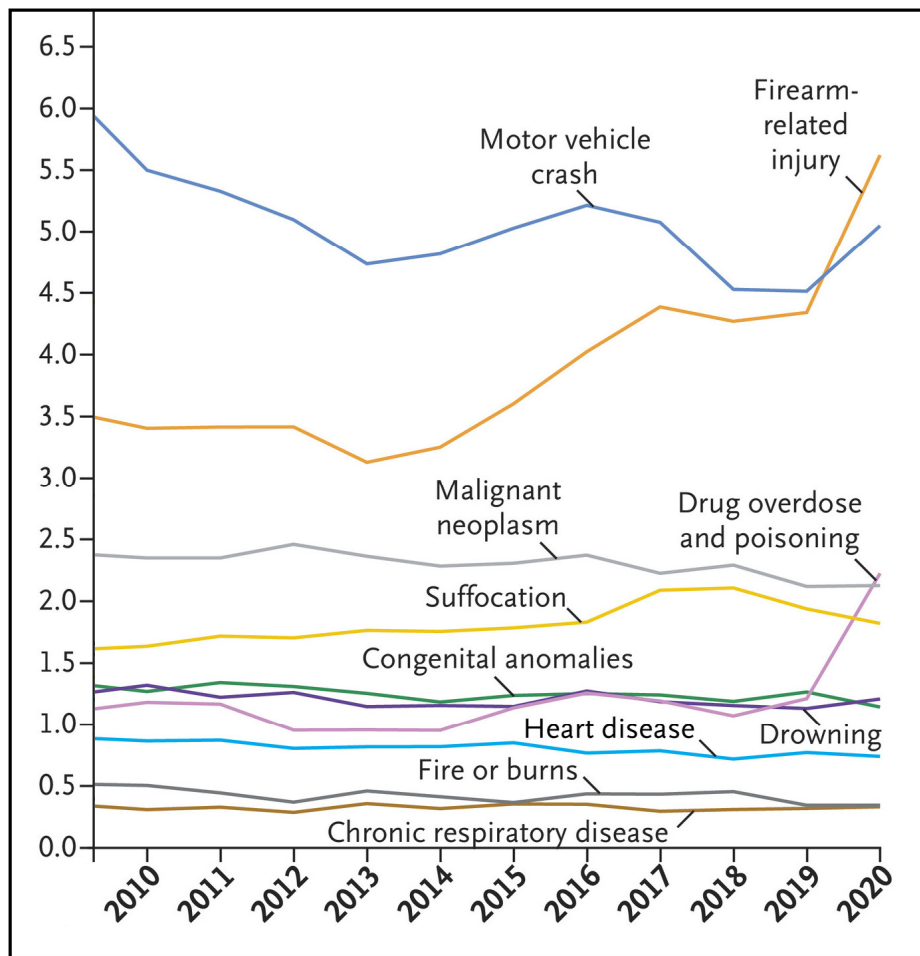
Our community has not recently experienced shootings on K-12 school grounds, but there have been cases of students killed or traumatized by gun violence outside of school, emphasizing the link between youth and domestic gun violence. According to the [Illinois Report Card](#), Bloomington District 87 has an enrollment of 4,610 students and McLean County Unit District 5 has an enrollment of 12,357 students:

	U5	D87	State		U5	D87	State
Student attendance rate	92.3%	91.5%	91.6%	High school drop out rate	2.5%	6.4%	2.7%
Chronic truancy rate	16.4%	22.7%	20.0%	High school 4-year grad	90.4%	77.4%	87.7%
Chronic absenteeism	23.1%	27.1%	26.3%				

Nationally

Deaths per 100,000 Children and Adolescents

Shootings are now the leading cause of death among ages 1-19 in the US, as found by the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) and outlined by [The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory 2024 - Firearm Violence: A Public Health Crisis in America](#). (Sent by Chairperson Denton Mar 30, 2025)



1e. Data Tools

Investigative Data Tools

The BPD has access to the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN), an ATF program. The BPD has a local terminal to rapidly identify and link fired cartridge casing pattern evidence to shooters, and guns to other crimes and crime scenes.

Research Data Tools

Illinois Department of Public Health

- [Gun Safety](#)
- [Violent deaths dashboard](#) (includes all violent deaths)

[Gun Violence Archive](#)

Everytown AI

- [Everytown research](#)
- [Everyshot](#)
- [Ask Everytown](#)

The Trace

- [Data Hub](#)
- [Data Library](#)

[Violence Policy Center](#)

[OneAim Illinois 2024 report](#)

2. Patterns

2a. Gun Violence Across Communities

Most illegal guns in Bloomington are being acquired through theft, particularly theft from vehicles. In addition, based on analysis of BPD's submissions to the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBN), approximately 40% of shootings between 2022-2024 were done with the same handgun(s). This does not mean the same suspect(s) are responsible for multiple shootings; guns are being treated as commodities, switching hands frequently.

- Most shootings involve guns that have been passed around, and are readily available guns to settle disputes.
- Shootings often involve hybrid gangs without connections to other cities, and spontaneous altercations.
- Shooter groups communicate through social media including YouTube (BPD Intelligence Jack McQueen)

BPD current or past efforts:

- Gun Buyback Events (217 guns bought back)
- 312 safes given out
- Training for dealing with active shooters at a location (school, business, government office, corporations and large events)
- Realistic trainings with role players
- Annual training requirement for participants
- School Resource Officers and Street Crime Unit are important as eyes and ears (Sergeant Kiel Nowers / BPD Community Engagement)
- Prevention by extensive community outreach (Sergeant Kiel Nowers / BPD Community Engagement)
- Building trust and rapport (Sergeant Kiel Nowers / BPD Community Engagement)
- Four other officers on part time basis in unit (Sergeant Kiel Nowers / BPD Community Engagement)
- De-escalation training to officers, school bus drivers, teachers, Project Oz (Sergeant Kiel Nowers / BPD Community Engagement)

Community Violence Intervention

Moms Demand Action and other community groups work to help keep guns out of hands of people who should not have them, identify when guns are illegally obtained, and maintain respect for responsible gun owners.

- The US Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs has noted that [Community Violence Intervention \(CVI\) can help communities address a range of violence issues](#).
- Johns Hopkins University has said that [CVI programs can be an important part of addressing gun violence risk and trauma](#). (Chairperson Denton Jul 23, 2024)

2b. Gun-based Domestic Violence

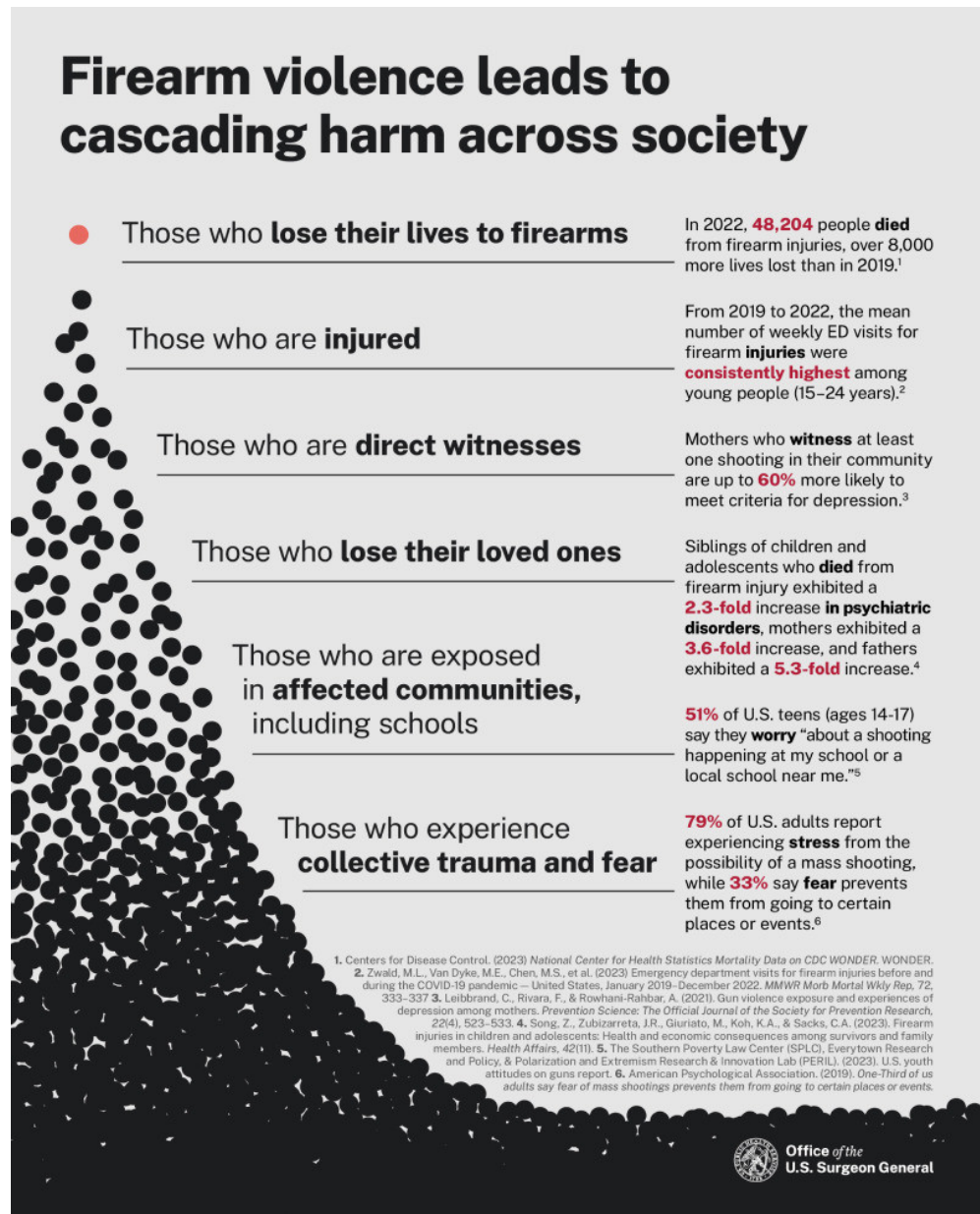
Even in the two years since this committee was established, our community has tragically experienced the effects of gun-based domestic violence on more than one occasion.

- [Authorities say 4 people died in a triple murder-suicide in Bloomington](#)
- [2 people shot dead inside home in northeast Normal in apparent murder-suicide](#)
- [Before murder-suicide, Matthew Moore faced few consequences for escalating behavior](#)
- [Illinois Mom Is Killed by Ex-Husband in Murder-Suicide, Leaving Their 3 Children Without Parents](#)
- [Teacher’s killing puts domestic violence at forefront](#)

As illustrated in [The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory 2024 - Firearm Violence: A Public Health Crisis in America](#), gun violence can have effects beyond its immediate victims—especially when loved ones are involved.

Some enforcement actions continue to be taken, or are underway, to address gun-based domestic violence:

- [Gov. Pritzker signs Karina's Bill into law, aiming to remove firearms from those accused of abuse](#)
- [Bloomington Police look to better track revoked FOID cards through State Police task force](#)
- [Firearm revocations are 'absolutely' on the honor system, say law enforcement](#)
- [Supreme Court upholds law that bars domestic abusers from having firearms](#)



2c. Gun-based Suicides

Guns as a means of suicide warrant discussion for a couple of reasons. As noted in this report's section on suicide method [lethality](#), a study of attempted suicides found that only 4% of people had reattempted and died in the 5 years after their attempt. Guns have the highest rate of lethality among suicide methods, eliminating the second chance for reconsideration. As noted in the section on Intervention below, almost half of suicides occur within the first 10 minutes of a suicidal thought. When people have a quick and lethal way to act upon suicidal thoughts, they have a higher likelihood of death.

Intervention

McLean County Coroner Dr. Kathleen Yoder (Mar 28, 2024) emphasized the importance of recognizing the signs of suicidal ideation and understanding psychosocial conflicts that someone might be experiencing. She advised that, if we ask someone whether they have a plan to commit suicide, and they do, we should work to remove that option from the person's reach. Dr. Adam Carter of PATH (Mar 28, 2024) provided some statistics about gun-based suicides:

- 47% of suicides occur within 10 minutes of suicidal thoughts. The availability of a gun leads to an immediate and lethal way to take action.
- In the age brackets of 10–24 and 25–44, deaths involving guns are more likely to be homicides than suicides. In the age bracket of 45–65+, gun deaths are more likely to be suicide than homicide.
- Middle-aged men are the least likely to call suicide support line 988.

Veterans

“Research shows that contentious post-deployment interactions with civilian family members are linked with poor mental health outcomes. However, supportive and emotionally intimate civilian family interactions with the returning veteran seem to protect against mental health problems. Family therapy sessions that include both the veteran and his or her family have been shown to successfully improve returning veterans' mental health outcomes. Just as spouse and family member relationships provide positive mental health benefits for veterans, so, too, do military relationships.” (Hinojosa, 2011)

We are now in the peak period for current conflict veterans for PTSD and Suicide

Risk factors:

- Substance abuse
- PTSD-related sleep issues
- Chronic Pain
- Combat Post Traumatic Stress Disorder - anger as a normal trained reaction
- Traumatic Brain Injuries - hearing loss, tinnitus, headaches, slowed executive functioning, slowed decision making, and other effects of brain injuries
- Military Sexual Trauma – broken trust, difficult to reach out for help

2d. Gun Violence Risks for Youth and Schools

It is essential to do all that we can to reduce the risk of gun violence in the environment that surrounds our community's youth, in school and elsewhere. Yet, that environment has complex risk factors:

- Lacking trust and relationships between youth and adults in the community
- Online interactions that can lead to short-term or long-term escalations that are not visible to the larger community
- Lack of a safe space where youth can spend time apart from school and home
- Lack of a brave space where youth can speak up

Recent news:

- [Juveniles' role in gun violence worries Bloomington-Normal police](#)

- [Why juveniles pick up a gun, and how a community can intervene](#)
- [Laws around realistic-looking fake guns leave room for fatal results](#)

Leslie Blockman, LCSW, Coordinator of Social Emotional Learning and Engagement, School District 87, spoke about three factors for reducing gun violence in her presentation to the commission:

1. Earlier intervention in children's lives
 - Many families have a distrust of schools. Earlier intervention, from the time a child is an infant, and keeping the families involved through working with them in their homes as well as working with the children at schools, would make a difference.
 - 90% of families are agreeing to social services when recommended, but that some families with children who need services don't meet the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) threshold to receive that help. There are currently less services available for children under the age of 5 years and there is a need for more, particularly for the Pre-K age range of 3-5 years. There is also a stigma in having DCFS involved with a family, so work needs to be done to remove that stigmatization of having an agency help families.
 - To address the idea of early intervention, Commissioner Selman suggested exploring the possibility of having hospitals offer parenting classes when babies are born. In her presentation to the commission, Karen Irvin, a volunteer with McLean County Moms Demand Action, said that the organization has tried to get information to new parents but it is hard to find someone who can give approval for this in a hospital.
2. Ongoing intervention and third spaces
 - Commissioner German raised the point that, after age 12, DCFS concludes events for children. She pointed out the need for safe third spaces for children older than 12 years. Commissioner Harris suggested seeing if the YMCA could get involved with adding more programs for children.
 - Staff Liaison Nowers replied that children at high school ages need a safe space for everyone, not just those at higher risk. He stated that shootings are feeding off social media and social media continues to evolve and new apps are appearing that parents do not know about and/or do not understand how to use to monitor their children's activity on them.
 - [One example](#) was shared by the Pantagraph reporter related to this discussion (sent by Chairperson Denton Sep 28, 2024)
3. Conflict resolution and gun safety training
 - Leslie Blockman indicated a need for teaching conflict resolution and expanding students' world exposure. The SEL curriculum tries to provide some different exposures. Children could benefit from learning skills at as early an age as possible for handling conflict they may be exposed to within their homes and neighborhoods.
 - By the time some children reach school age, they have already learned behaviors from their families and environments. Often, adults become addicted to social media and constantly scrolling through their phones, and children model the behaviors. Noted: "diss" videos play into interpersonal conflicts between students outside of school. Struggles with depression and anxiety are strong reasons that the absenteeism rate is so high. Additionally, students stay up late at night playing video games and engaging in social media, resulting in less sleep and affecting how they feel the following day at school. They mimic the behaviors they see in adults. People, including children, are frequently exposed online to unrealistic things and conflicts online that would not happen if people were face-to-face.

Proactive programs

Stephanie Barisch, MS, LCPC, Director of Therapeutic Services at The Center for Youth and Family Solutions in Bloomington, said that funding for services and resources largely flows toward responding and reacting to situations, not toward measures that could prevent the situations. Barisch believes more attention needs to go toward people at younger ages. To truly change the trajectory of gun violence, focus on programs that reach children at a younger age, before they need therapy/treatment.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Barisch said that research shows a high quality SEL curriculum has resulted in improvement in academic engagement, an increase in graduation rates and college readiness, a reduction in conflict with other students and teachers, and a decrease in domestic violence. The program being used in East Moline is for students only and is specifically focused on students who have been identified as needing preventative intervention. The kindergarten through 8th grade students have given positive feedback about their experience with the curriculum group and they do not feel singled out.

Leslie Blockman, LCSW, Coordinator of Social Emotional Learning and Engagement, School District 87, outlined a SEL program in District 87 encompasses pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and provides multiple levels of support for students.

- Tier 1 (core SEL instruction) includes all students within the school district, from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. The 7 Mindsets curriculum lessons are taught weekly by classroom teachers.
- Tier 2 (supplemental SEL instruction) provided to students who may need more in-depth support. These students receive targeted interventions to address specific challenges.
- Tier 3 (intensive SEL instruction) provided to students who have been identified as needing small group or individual support and interventions tailored to their unique needs.

Barisch provided a list of resources following her presentation to the commission. (Sent by Assistant Chief Veerman Sep 18 2024):

- [Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) and Student Benefits](#)
- [What Does the Research Say?](#) Hundreds of independent studies confirm: SEL benefits students.
- [The Power of Life Skills for Healthier Futures](#)
- [Why Social and Emotional Learning Is Essential for Students](#)
- [Social and emotional learning during early adolescence](#): Effectiveness of a classroom-based SEL program for middle school students
- [Why Social and Emotional Learning Is Essential for Students](#)
- [As Safety Threats Rise in Schools, Could SEL Programs Help?](#) - EdSurge News
- [Universal School-Based SEL Programs - Stage 2 Report](#): The State of the Evidence for Social and Emotional Learning: A Contemporary Meta-Analysis of Universal School-Based SEL Interventions -
- [Illinois State Board of Education SEL Standards](#)
- [District 87's web-based curriculum for SEL](#) (WGLT), which Barisch said is more of a universal education.

District 87 School Resource Officer Scott Day said that training for working with students who have autism would be helpful, as well as training to work with children experiencing anxiety.

School Resource Officer (SRO) Roles

SRO Scott Day said the SRO role wears multiple hats, including being an informal counselor/mentor, an educator and a police officer. SROs spend an average of 50% of their time in the role of counselor to the students. SROs also act as crisis negotiators and de-escalators. They depend on four core skills:

- Communication
- De-escalation
- Patience
- Empathy

SRO programs are shifting the focus away from punitive methods to restorative justice, working with community and school resources to help students, including:

- Project Oz
- Mclean County Center for Human Services

- YWCA / Stepping Stones
- Western Avenue Community Center
- 100 Black Men
- The Jule Foundation / Andre Hursey
- McLean County Juvenile Court Services

Day said that accessibility to guns is an issue for students. Students can get guns from friends, parents, sellers, often from people in their 20s. There is speculation that students are being given guns to carry out a specific act within the school. People with concealed carry licenses sometimes leave guns in their vehicles and their vehicles are then broken into.

Restorative Programs

The [University of Chicago Choose to Change program](#) (C2C®) combines trauma-informed therapy with wraparound supports and aims to reduce youth violence while improving educational outcomes outside of an institutional setting. ... study finds that C2C can effectively and sustainably reduce violence engagement and the likelihood of being arrested. Two years after the program, C2C reduces the likelihood of youth being arrested for a violent crime by 39 percent. The positive effects of C2C extend for at least 36 months after randomization, and participants were 23% less likely to face arrest during this period. (sent by Assistant Chief Veerman Oct 14, 2024, from Chairperson Denton)

Risk Factors

In the wake of the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA) formed a Youth Violence Commission to study known risk factors for youth violence. In its report, the [Commission identified the following environmental factors](#):

1. Easy access to guns.
2. Social exclusion and isolation.
3. Family and neighborhood characteristics.
4. Media violence.
5. School characteristics.
6. Substance use.
7. Stressful events.

The commission's report concluded with a section on reducing the risk of youth violence, which stated: "Although some risk factors are static (i.e., not subject to change and thus not amenable to treatment), others are dynamic and thus malleable in the context of appropriate intervention. For example, it is not possible to alter a youth's history of maltreatment or exposure to domestic violence, but it is possible to improve a youth's capacity to manage intense anger, reduce his or her use of violent media, and limit his or her access to guns. Evidence is growing that self-regulation skills are also malleable, beginning in early childhood. Self-control training can increase self-control and decrease delinquency. The likelihood of violence also may be reduced by interventions focused on developing skills such as empathy, perspective taking, social problem-solving, and conflict resolution. For high risk youth, we must also invest in building protective factors (e.g., prosocial involvements, social support, attachment to positive role models, strong commitment to educational attainment)."

3. Recommendations

Gun violence is a complex issue, but one that is critical to address. It is the SCSC perspective that any actions taken as a result of our recommendations be viewed as an investment toward a safer community, not simply a cost. Based on our hearings, research, and discussions, the SCSC presents the following recommendations:

1. *Expand Community Group Collaboration*

Collaborate with and organize workshop group within the county regarding prevention GV

- 1.1. Consider forming a task force that includes representatives from community organizations, agencies, city, town and county councils and commissions to develop specific plans to reduce gun violence. A collaborative task force could unify the work to:
 - 1.1.1. Collect information on what each organization, agency, council or commission is doing to reduce gun violence, to maintain alignment with the Mental Health and Public Safety Fund Advisory Council, McLean County Reentry Council, Health Committee, Justice Committee, Juvenile Justice Council, Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 553, and other organizations.
 - 1.1.2. Identify areas of need and areas of overlap in order to align and coordinate the efforts within our community.
 - 1.1.3. Develop community wide recommendations.
- 1.2. Improve DV data collection and reporting: Push for enhanced data collection and reporting to state and federal government with regular reporting on domestic violence incidents, fatalities, and the role of guns
- 1.3. Obtain survivor feedback: Collect survivor input on the impact of current policies and enforcement practices

2. *Promote Gun Security*

Keeping guns away from those who should not have them (Storage methods, FOID recovery, gun locks, buybacks). The strongest partnerships on this issue have been with Moms Demand Action, NAACP, Prairie Pride Coalition, Mid Central Community Action, YWCA, YMCA, and the NAACP Youth Group. The Be Smart education work on secure gun storage worked with Carle to provide posters for emergency rooms and train nurses to make sure parents knew how to secure guns. The Bloomington Police Department asked Moms Demand Action and Be Smart to attend two events in 2023 which were part of a grant: The Gun Lock Giveaway and the Gun Buyback

- 2.1. Investigate ways to obtain additional funds to support the Bloomington Police Department when guns must be seized due to a FOID card revocation.
- 2.2. Community conversations on gun laws: Host public education sessions about Illinois state gun laws, Orders of Protection, and FOID revocations, emphasizing how these policies protect the community when properly enforced. This is particularly important in light of recent DV homicides and the data we have on OP violations. This also aligns with a recommendation by the ICADV: Disseminate widely, have conversations locally about what is working at the local level as far as protection order enforcement including gun dispossession (there are civil courts that have regular calendar check ins concerning specific provisions in protection orders and accountability of the respondent) and encouraging these kinds of programs locally (ICADV).

- 2.3. Secure Storage Education – explore methods to develop and distribute information on secure gun storage to hospitals, physician's offices, behavioral health agencies, daycare providers, McLean County Health Department, schools, local gun dealers, and other relevant entities. The following organizations have created materials to help increase awareness of secure storage:
 - Secure Gun Storage Saves Kids' Lives (English, Spanish) – Be SMART for kids
 - End Family Fire – Brady United Against Gun Violence
 - Own It? Respect It. Secure It. – National Shooting Sports Foundation
- 2.4. Consider ways to increase the distribution of gun locks – for example, providing gun locks to hospitals, physician's offices, behavioral health agencies, daycares, etc.
- 2.5. Investigate ways to fund regularly scheduled Gun Safe Giveaways – 312 safes were distributed on 6/10/23 by the Bloomington Police Department
- 2.6. Investigate ways to fund regularly scheduled Gun Buy Back Programs – 217 guns were turned into the Bloomington Police Department on 10/29/23.

3. Gather Youth Perspectives

- 3.1. Investigate ways to gather information from citizens of different ages regarding their experiences and concerns with gun violence in the community.
- 3.2. Conduct a comprehensive youth survey that explores needs, experiences with violence, perspectives on violence, and recommendations for preventing, interrupting and healing from violence.

4. Support Suicide Prevention

- 4.1. Consider developing and publicizing information on secure gun storage to men in the 45 – 64 and 65+ age groups locally. (Del Saam and Art Rodriguez May 22, 2025)
- 4.2. Consider developing and publicizing information on how to acquire a firearm restraining order (FRO) locally. For example, hospitals, physician's offices, behavioral health agencies, McLean County Health Department, schools, and local organizations working with victims of domestic violence in our community. (Del Saam and Art Rodriguez May 22, 2025)
- 4.3. Consider ways to publicize information about the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (Del Saam and Art Rodriguez May 22, 2025)
- 4.4. Veterans:
 - 4.4.1. Gun locks: Most suicidal ideations subside within the first 5-15 minutes, so any delay to accessing weapons can be important.
 - 4.4.2. Firearm Restraining Order: [Application of Illinois firearm restraining order](#) for those identified at risk

5. Strengthen Domestic Violence Programs

5.1. Education and awareness

- 5.1.1. Perhaps some community conversations about Illinois state gun laws, orders of Protection, and FOID revocations. Improved public and community education on how these policies protect the public and community.
- 5.1.2. Disseminate widely, have conversations locally about what is working at the local level as far as protection order enforcement including gun dispossession (there are civil courts that have regular calendar check ins concerning specific provisions in protection orders and accountability of the respondent) and encouraging these kinds of programs locally (ICADV).
- 5.1.3. Improved materials and training for all system stakeholders including judges, law enforcement, public health organizations, and others (ICADV)
- 5.1.4. Prevention education (youth) focused on healthy relationships, appropriate ways to manage anger (emotional intelligence) and treatment for children of families who experienced DV

5.2. Prioritize funding and data collection

- 5.2.1. DV data could be shared locally to help maximize funding. Sometimes, there has to be an intentional thought to get collaborations going. There might be collaborative grants available where MCCA's program or Project Oz could work directly with BPD. YWCA Stepping Stones just officially signed an MOU with BPD.
- 5.2.2. Push for more required data collection and reporting to the state and federal government with regular reporting of that data about domestic violence incidents including fatalities and the role of guns (ICADV)

5.3. Activism and reform guided by evidence-based practices

- 5.3.1. Increase accountability for orders of protection and restraining orders. Find ways for Bloomington to play a more significant role in encouraging the state's attorney to bring charges. Data shows that Orders of Protection aren't taken seriously or there is little accountability when they are violated.
- 5.3.2. Improve survivor outreach so that survivors engage in services and understand what will improve their personal safety.
- 5.3.3. Obtain survivor feedback on the impact of these policies and enforcement (also related to data collection)

5.4. Policy and systems reform

- 5.4.1. Strengthen protective order enforcement accountability: Advocate for consistent prosecution of protective order violations, with the city playing a more forceful role in encouraging the state's attorney to bring charges when orders are violated
- 5.4.2. Establish multi-disciplinary working groups: Create compliance-focused teams responsible for addressing implementation challenges in every jurisdiction, with family violence coordinating councils making gun protections a priority for local accountability
- 5.4.3. Improve gun dispossession protocols: Encourage local implementation of civil court programs that conduct regular calendar check-ins concerning specific provisions in protection orders and respondent accountability

6. Fund School Programming

These include R3 grants to continue, Project Oz in Schools, Resource Officers

We think that we have some amazing resources, and our main recommendation is to support the unmet needs of those resources and services. We also recommend supporting collaboration across these services and then addressing the gaps we have identified (like the 211). Initiatives that have worked in the past have included those that reach out to families and give them a place to gather, or that geographically target neighborhoods to offer spaces and resources:

- 6.1. Fund existing violence prevention programs: Provide financial support to established organizations including Project Oz, Restorative Justice programs (Kevin Jones), YWCA Stepping Stones Prevention Education, and MCCA prevention education programs
 - 6.1.1. 211 hotline eliminated – This could mean transitioning this to another org (and compensating them for that)
 - 6.1.2. Support getting additional personnel to expand Project Oz into all Unit 5 and District 87 schools, getting the restorative practices program into more schools and younger grades
 - 6.1.3. Expand restorative justice programs: Implement restorative justice practices in more schools and communities, extending to younger grade levels across all districts.
 - 6.1.4.
 - 6.1.4.1. Leslie Blockman mentioned that the increase in anxiety/depression they see was often linked to social media and video games. She suggested social media training for parents/students. For parents-how to monitor and how to model appropriate behavior. Most parents are also addicted to their phones. She also suggested more training for parents on how to connect with their kids. Schools are finding that there is that lost connection, in part due to technology and in part due to lack of parenting knowledge or understanding. This could tie into efforts for third spaces, activities, positive suggestions.
 - 6.1.4.2. Regional alternative school is the only option for external behaviors. Investigate additional alternatives to the regional alternative school for students with external behavioral challenges, beyond the current BRIDGE program for internalizing behaviors.
- 6.2. Remove logistical barriers: Increase funding to existing organizations to expand services and eliminate access barriers for clients
- 6.3. Create targeted RFP process: Develop request for proposals based on identified youth/violence prevention service gaps, or directly allocate funds to priority organizations
- 6.4. Support grant application partnerships: Assist organizations in collaborative grant applications for violence prevention funding
- 6.5. Explore data-sharing for funding maximization: Facilitate local domestic violence data sharing between agencies to enhance collaborative grant opportunities (potential partnerships between MCCA's program or Project Oz with BPD)
- 6.6. Formalize agency partnerships: Support the development of MOUs between service providers and law enforcement (building on YWCA Stepping Stones' recent MOU with BPD)
- 6.7. Awareness campaign for youth resources: Launch coordinated campaign highlighting third spaces and resources available to youth, potentially managed by the EJ hub through biweekly newsletters and social media campaigns
 - 6.7.1. Coordinated campaign to bring attention to these spaces and resources that exist, with a social media or other campaign that shares ongoing events and resources.
 - 6.7.2. City resources supporting more options for third spaces-not school or home-things that are not mandated or disciplinary

- 6.8. Youth-focused prevention education: Implement programs focused on healthy relationships, anger management (emotional intelligence), and treatment for children from families who experienced domestic violence
- 6.9. Parent education initiatives: Provide training for parents on social media monitoring, appropriate technology modeling, and strategies for connecting with their children
- 6.10. Educational programs (PTO, etc.): System stakeholder training: Improve materials and training for judges, law enforcement, public health organizations, and other system stakeholders
 Note: Currently, there is no specific gun safety training in the schools. Some students have not been exposed to guns, while others have already had personal experience with guns and gunfire.

7. Invest in Mental Health Programs

7.1. Veterans:

- 7.1.1. Housing: Lincoln tiny homes for homeless veterans (resident-owned after 10 years)
 Currently required to have EV chargers, an additional \$10-20k expense
 Connections to city infrastructure can be expensive or prohibitive
- 7.1.2. Connections: Opportunities, environments, and programs to help veterans connect with family or military family

Local resources

- [Veterans Affairs](#) of Central Illinois: Healthcare starts with a 10-10EZ
 - [Peoria Veterans Center](#)
 - [VA hospital in Danville](#) (Illiana)
 - [VA Outpatient Clinic in Peoria](#) (Bob Michael)
 - [VA Clinic in Bloomington](#)
- Local PTSD
 - Vet Center PTSD group at the Health Dept every other Wed at noon
 - Rush Road Home program PTSD group every third Wed at 5pm online
 - Dr. Williams PTSD group on Wed nights at 6pm above Fox and Hound

National Resources

- Veterans Crisis Line 988 Press 1
- Women Veterans Call Center
1-855-VA-WOMEN (1-855-829-6636) for calls or texts, run by women for Women Veterans needs
- [VFW](#) - VA separation and benefits, financial grants, student support, mental wellness
- American Legion
- Rush Health System [Road Home Program](#)
- UCLA Health [Operation Mend](#)
- Emory School of Medicine [Medical Health Service Line](#)
- Massachusetts General Hospital [Home Base](#)
- Reboot [Combat Recovery](#) Spiritual-based 12-week program

Related committees

- [Mental health and public safety fund advisory](#) council
- [McLean County Reentry Council](#) meets the third Friday of every month 1:00 – 2:00 p.m.
- Health Committee of the McLean County Board meets the first Tuesday following the first Monday of the month at 4:00 p.m.
- Justice committee meets the first Wednesday following the first Monday of the month at 4:00 p.m.

- [553](#) meets the second Wednesday of the month at 5:30 p.m.
- [Criminal Justice Coordinating Council](#) meets as scheduled
- Juvenile justice council – no longer meeting on a regular basis, no current chair

8. *Continue the Special Commission for Safe Communities*

- 8.1. If it is determined that the Special Commission has concluded its work following the submission of its two-year report, the City Council should consider expanding the mission of the Public Safety and Community Relations Board, or another permanent committee or body (as outlined in recommendation 1.1), to continue the commission's progress. This permanent body could follow up on the recommendations initiated by the Special Commission, update recommendations, and present the City Council with detailed proposals for acting upon those recommendations. The City Council should also make this report publicly available on the city website.

It is critical that we continually work to enhance community safety by reducing the risk of gun violence.

Appendix 1: Funding and Programs

As [Reuters reported](#), the current federal administration has terminated more than half of all federal funding for gun violence prevention and community violence intervention (CVI) programs in the U.S. Of the 145 community violence intervention (CVI) grants totaling more than \$300 million awarded through the U.S. Department of Justice, 69 grants were abruptly terminated in April, according to government data analyzed by Reuters.

Remaining federal funding can be identified with the [Everytown Govgrant Navigator](#)., and funding is available through other sources.

- State of Illinois [R3 funding](#)
R3 grants fund programs in Illinois communities that have been harmed by violence, excessive incarceration, and economic disinvestment. Commissioner Shannon spoke about R3 funding that had been stopped by the state, to which the commission had written a letter. Funding was reopened temporarily at a reduced amount, but it may help continue some services. They are writing a grant proposal for it.
- Kaiser Permanente [Center for Gun Violence Research and Education](#)
The Center funds research to test and expand health interventions that treat and prevent gun injuries and deaths.
- [National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research](#) (NCGVR)
The Collaborative has funded \$23.6 million in grants for gun policy research projects on topics including suicide, violent crime, school violence, officer-involved shootings, gun safety, defensive gun use and non-lethal gun injuries. In total, the Collaborative has funded 55 research projects, including 13 dissertation and seven postdoctoral projects.
- David Bohnett Foundation [Gun Violence Prevention](#) Grants
David Bohnett and the David Bohnett Foundation have contributed more than \$135 million in grants to socially active organizations.

Appendix 2: Commission Members

Per the original establishment of the commission:

The Special Commission for Safe Communities shall consist of nine members appointed by the Mayor with the advice and consent of the City Council. Members shall serve for a two-year term. The Chair and a Vice-Chair of the Special Commission shall be selected amongst the members of the Special Commission. A majority of the sitting members of the Special Commission shall constitute a quorum. Members shall serve until their successors are appointed and confirmed, unless removed from office.

Appointed by	Position	Name	Term Expires
Mayor Appointed Position	Member	Kevin Crutcher	04/30/2027
Mayor Appointed Position	Member	Kaitlyn Selman	10/09/2025
Mayor Appointed Position	Member	Cathy Lust	10/09/2025
Mayor Appointed Position	Member	Cierra Aiden	4/30/2027
Mayor Appointed Position	Member	Elizabeth German	10/09/2025
Mayor Appointed Position	Member	John Scott Denton	10/09/2025
Mayor Appointed Position	Member	Timothy Harris	10/09/2025
Mayor Appointed Position	Member	Ryan Bertrand	5/09/2026
Mayor Appointed Position	Member	Robert Harris	4/30/2027

Appendix 3: Commission Presenters

- Dr. Dawn Beichner – Thomas, Illinois State University
- Stephanie Barisch, Center for Youth and Family Solutions
- Leslie Blockman, Bloomington School District 87
- Dr. Adam Carter, PATH Chief Executive Officer
- Scott Day, School Resource Officer
- Karen Irvin, McLean County Moms Demand Action
- Kevin Jones, Pathways 2 Restorative Leadership
- Jack McQueen, Bloomington Police Department
- Sgt. Kiel Nowers, Bloomington Police Department
- Sgt. Joseph Rizzi, Bloomington Police Department
- Art Rodriguez, McLean County Veterans Assistance Commission
- Del Saam, McLean County Veterans Treatment Court
- Jay Shannon, Project Oz
- Assistant Chief Aaron Veerman, Bloomington Police Department
- Dr. Kathy Yoder, McLean County Coroner

Appendix 4: Document URL Index

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