

May 10, 2023

The Honorable Governor Brian P. Kemp
206 Washington Street
Suite 203, State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

The Honorable Jon G. Burns
206 Washington Street
Suite 332, State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

The Honorable Burt Jones
206 Washington Street
Suite 240, State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

Re: Call for special legislative session to address gun safety legislation

Governor Kemp, Speaker Burns, and Lieutenant Governor Jones:

We, the undersigned legislators, request a convening of a special session and special bipartisan committee to address the public health epidemic of gun violence in our state, particularly in light of the May 4, 2023 shooting in midtown Atlanta that left four Georgians wounded and one dead. The shooter led police on an eight-hour manhunt, during which time metro Atlanta schools were locked down, businesses were shuttered, and significant public safety resources were spent.

On May 5, 2023, in Moultrie, Georgia another gunman went on a shooting rampage, killing his grandmother, his mother, and a third victim, before killing himself.

As we draft this letter, we have learned of yet another senseless mass shooting, stealing the lives of at least eight victims in Allen, Texas. These incidents follow multiple recent events where young people accidentally showed up at the wrong door (Missouri), driveway (New York), or car (Texas) and were shot, causing serious injuries and, in one case, death.

Georgia has the 8th highest rate of gun homicides and gun assaults in the country, and firearms are the leading cause of death for Georgia's children and teens. Every year, 932 people in Georgia die by gun suicide, and an additional 64 are wounded by gun suicide attempts. A Georgian dies by gun suicide every ten hours, on average.¹

¹ CDC, Wide-ranging ONline Data for Epidemiologic Research (WONDER), five-year average: 2016–2020.

Georgia's lax gun laws also cost citizens in dollars and cents. Gun deaths and injuries cost Georgia \$23.9 billion each year, of which \$597.8 million is paid by taxpayers at a rate of \$2,249 per resident per year.²

Georgians are living in fear, and their fear is justified. Parents send their children to school every morning with a pit in their stomachs. Too many people have gone to church, spas, doctors' offices, grocery stores, malls, parks, concerts, and never returned home due to senseless gun violence. The growing threat that anyone could be next hangs over all Georgians, and our constituents are demanding action.

The urgency of Georgia's gun violence epidemic warrants an equally urgent response. Lives will be lost every day that Georgia's leaders fail to take action.

During the 2023 legislative session, legislators proposed at least 16 bills to reduce gun violence. Not one was even given a vote. We request a special legislative session to consider the following bills:

- 1) HB 44 - Universal Background Check Act - Requires that everyone who acquires a gun, including through private gun sales and transfers, undergoes a background check.
- 2) HB 135 and 161 - Safe Storage - HB 135 establishes that failure to secure a firearm that is subsequently accessed by a minor and publicly displayed or used for a threat of violence, or accessed by anyone and used for a crime, or to cause injury or death shall be a misdemeanor. HB 161 requires that any firearm that might be accessed by a minor be safely secured.
- 3) HB 584 - Georgia Red Flag Protective Order Act - Permits state courts to order the temporary removal of firearms from a person they believe may present an imminent danger to themselves or others.

Ted R. Miller, David Swedler, and Kate Schnippel analysis of Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project nonfatal injury: 2019.

² Ted R. Miller and Bruce Lawrence analysis of CDC fatal injury: 2019 and HCUP nonfatal injury: 2019.

These common sense measures are proven policy solutions to curb gun violence.³ Therefore, it is no surprise that a strong bipartisan majority of Georgians support the passage of gun safety legislation.⁴

A special session, and a new bipartisan Special Committee on Preventing Gun Violence (with an equal number of Republicans and Democrats), can thoroughly examine the issues facing our state, hear testimony from experts, gun owners, and Georgians directly impacted by gun violence, and vote on these proposals designed to increase Georgians' freedom to go about their lives, while preserving our constitutional rights. Georgians deserve our consideration of these proposals. It's the very least we can do.

Pursuant to the Georgia Constitution, there are two mechanisms for calling a special session. The Governor may call a special session, or in the alternative, if three-fifths of the members of the Georgia House and Senate request a special session in writing, the Governor shall convene one.⁵ The undersigned are pursuing both options and invite our colleagues to join us. The public deserves to see, on the record, the names of the elected leaders who were willing to take a stand, and those who do nothing.

We implore you to listen to the voices of the majority of Georgians who are demanding common sense reforms now and call for a special session. Inaction on this issue will lead to more senseless death and suffering. We have the power to correct this dangerous trajectory and we respectfully urge you and our colleagues to use it.

Respectfully,

³ Siegel M., and Boine C. "What Are the Most Effective Policies in Reducing Gun Homicides?". Rockefeller Institute of Government, (2019). <https://bit.ly/2YPAz7P>.

Jeffrey W. Swanson et al., "Criminal Justice and Suicide Outcomes with Indiana's Risk-Based Gun Seizure Law," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online* 47, no. 2 (2019): 188–97, <http://hdl.handle.net/1805/22638>.

Jeffrey W. Swanson et al., "Implementation and Effectiveness of Connecticut's Risk-Based Gun Removal Law: Does It Prevent Suicides?" *Law and Contemporary Problems* 80 (2017): 179–208.

Webster DW, Vernick JS, Zeoli AM, Manganello JA. Association Between Youth-Focused Firearm Laws and Youth Suicides. *JAMA*. 2004;292(5):594–601. doi:10.1001/jama.292.5.594 <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/199194>

⁴<https://www.11alive.com/article/news/local/poll-georgia-voters-guns/85-683791f7-f89b-4dda-bd96-54bf2469661e>

<https://www.foxnews.com/official-polls/fox-news-poll-voters-voice-support-gun-reform>

⁵ Ga. Const. art. V, § II, para. VII.

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Rep. David Wilkerson, HD 38
Rep. Terry Cummings, HD 39
Rep. Doug Stoner, HD 40
Rep. Michael Smith, HD 41
Rep. Teri Anulewicz, HD 42
Rep. Solomon Adesanya, HD 43
Rep. Michelle Au, HD 50
Rep. Esther Panitch, HD 51
Rep. Shea Roberts, HD 52
Rep. Betsy Holland, HD 54
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Rep. Mesha Mainor, HD 56
Rep. Stacey Evans, HD 57
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Rep. Miriam Paris, HD 142
Rep. James Beverly, HD 143
Rep. Patty Bentley, HD 150
Rep. David Sampson, HD 153
Rep. Anne Allen Westbrook, HD 163
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CC: Members of the Georgia General Assembly