



June 11, 2015

## **FACT SHEET: Handgun Purchaser Licensing Act**

*Introduced by Congressman Chris Van Hollen, Senator Richard Blumenthal, Senator Chris Murphy, and Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty*

- Far and away, handguns are responsible for the most firearm deaths in the United States each year. In 2013, handguns accounted for nearly 90 percent of all firearm homicides.
- New research published by The Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research shows a clear link between requiring a license to purchase a handgun and a dramatic reduction in firearm homicides. Their research found that Connecticut's adoption of its handgun purchaser licensing law led to a 40 percent decrease in firearm homicide rates. Earlier research found that Missouri's repeal of its similar law led to a 25 percent increase in firearm homicide rates.
- Handgun purchaser laws close many of the loopholes that exist in our current federal background check system. Current law requires handgun purchasers to pass a background check only if the seller is a federally licensed firearm dealer. However, permit-to-purchase requirements ensure that licensed *and* unlicensed firearm sellers are required to sell handguns to individuals with a valid permit or license.
- Although 10 states and the District of Columbia currently require handgun purchaser licenses, it is still far too easy for handguns to be trafficked into those states from states that don't have these requirements. For instance, while it has been widely reported that there has been a surge of firearm violence in Baltimore this year, data for guns traced to crime in Maryland in 2013 shows that 44 percent of those guns originated from outside the state. Maryland borders three states that have no such requirements: Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Virginia.
- In 2013, Maryland signed into law the Firearm Safety Act, which requires nearly every individual in the state to possess a valid license before he or she may purchase, rent, or receive a handgun. In October 2013, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals declared that this law was fully consistent with the Second Amendment, and the Supreme Court declined to review that decision.
- The Handgun Purchaser Licensing Act authorizes a grant program at the Department of Justice to encourage states to establish permit-to-purchase requirements for all handguns, including at gun shows and with private sellers. This grant would help offset the costs associated with the development, implementation, and evaluation of these programs.
- To be eligible, states must require individuals applying for a license to meet the following criteria:
  - provide proof they are at least 21 years old and a lawful resident of the United States;
  - apply for the license at a law enforcement agency within the state;
  - submit to a background investigation and criminal history check;
  - submit fingerprints and photographs with their application; and
  - be eligible to purchase a handgun pursuant to the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (P.L. 103-159, Title I; 107 Stat. 1536).