March 6, 2023

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
United States Senate
Washington, DC  20510

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate
Washington, DC  20510

The Honorable Christopher Murphy
United States Senate
Washington, DC  20510

Dear Senators Van Hollen, Blumenthal and Murphy:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I am writing to express our support for the Handgun Permit to Purchase Act (S. 117), legislation that would authorize grants to states to support handgun purchaser licensing programs. To qualify for the grants, states must require gun purchasers to be at least the age of 21 and be subject to a criminal background check.

The ACP is the largest medical specialty organization and the second-largest physician membership society in the United States. The ACP members include 160,000 internal medicine physicians, related subspecialists, and medical students. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge, clinical expertise, and compassion to the preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness.

THE EPIDEMIC OF FIREARMS-RELATED DEATHS

According to the most recent data published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention, “in 2020, there were 45,222 firearm-related deaths in the United States – that’s about 124 people dying from a firearm-related injury each day. More than half of firearm-related deaths were suicides and more than 4 out of every 10 were firearm homicides.” Equally alarming is the fact that, in 2020, “firearms became the leading cause of death among children ages 19 and below and in the first six months of 2022, there were over 300 mass shootings across the U.S., including the shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas,” as outlined in a 2022 report by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

CALL TO ACTION

For more than two decades, ACP has called for common-sense policies that would help reduce the number of injuries and deaths stemming from firearms. In 2019, ACP joined with 41 other leading organizations in a joint call-to-action that called for evidence-based solutions to mitigate firearms violence. In 2018, ACP released a position paper that reaffirms the reality that physicians are indeed on the front lines of encountering patients who have been subjected to firearm-related violence and that this issue is very much a threat to the public health. Physicians should discuss with their patients
the risks that may be associated with having a firearm in the home and recommend ways to mitigate such risks, just like they would with anything that could pose a risk to their patients’ health, including not using seatbelts, not getting vaccinated, or using tobacco.

ACP strongly supports legislation that would enhance background checks. Examples of gun sales not requiring background checks through National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) include those at gun shows, through the internet, and between private individuals or classified ads. In addition, ACP strongly supports strengthening the accuracy and reporting of the NICS as well as expanding Brady background checks to cover all firearm sales, including unlicensed firearms sellers currently not required to use background checks

CONCLUSION

It is critically important that policymakers and all stakeholders at the federal and state levels take swift action to mitigate what has become a national epidemic in firearms-related injury and death. We are highly supportive of a federal grant program to better enable states to implement more effective handgun purchaser licensing requirements to improve public safety. We as physicians stand ready to do our part in helping to find a solution. Should you have any questions, or if we can be of further assistance, please contact George Lyons at glyons@acponline.org.

Sincerely,

Ryan D. Mire, MD, MACP
President