

MORE GUNS = MORE CRIMES

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Flooding the streets with more guns is NOT the answer to solving crimes! In a...

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Flooding the streets with more guns is NOT the answer to solving crimes!

In a state known by many to be “conservative” relative to its politics, the state of Texas has, in fact, become more and more “liberal” when considering the unlimited access to guns without a license that legislators have allowed Texans to have after the “permitless carry” legislation was signed into law by Governor Greg Abbott last legislative session.

It seems like every day we hear reports about violent gun crimes taking place across Texas, and across Harris County, on top of stories of individuals who have been recently sentenced because of the role they played in a fatal act of gun violence.

Harris County District Attorney Kim Ogg recently shared information that stated that since the beginning of her administration in January 2017 to January of this year (2023), there has been a significant rise in the local murder rate and cited that there has been a near doubling of homicide cases filed—from 1,019 to 1,841—during that same timeframe.

This influx of guns on the streets, and in the hands of many untrained individuals, has made, and will only make, matters worse without any preventative accountability mechanisms in place.

Take the case of Gerald W. Williams as a prime example.

On July 6, 2021, Williams, 35, fatally shot 17-year-old David Castro during a road-rage incident as he was leaving an Astros game baseball game with his family.

Williams pleaded guilty to murder and was sentenced to 30 years in prison on January 16th. The plea, which was approved by Castro’s family, means family members will not have to testify in a murder trial.

“The victim in this case was set to be a National Merit Scholarship finalist and had a bright future ahead of him,” said DA Ogg. “Gun crime in Harris County is out of control, and no one should have to die because of an argument in traffic.”

Paul Castro, the victim’s father, thanked Ogg, the Houston Police Department, Crime Stoppers of Houston, and Assistant District Attorneys Alycia Harvey and Maroun Koutani, who handled the case, for ensuring that Williams was brought to justice.

Another recent sentencing involved 22-year-old Jesse Quinones who pleaded guilty to murder on January 18th, in exchange for 35 years in prison for killing his 17-year-old schoolmate, Patrick Aldape, over \$250 on April 13, 2017.

Quinones was a student at ACE (Accelerated Center-Education) when he brought a 9mm pistol to a meeting with Aldape in a cul-de-sac at 500 Slumberwood in the Northshore area. Quinones had been working on a shotgun that belonged to Aldape.

The two teens met at the cul-de-sac and Quinones gave Aldape the shotgun, which was wrapped in a towel, and Aldape put it in the trunk of his car. Aldape then reminded Quinones that he also owed Aldape \$250, and Quinones said he needed to go get the money.

Instead, he drove a few blocks away, loaded his 9mm pistol and returned. When he got back, Aldape walked up to the car and Quinones shot him from the driver's seat. Quinones then fired several more times. He later told investigators he continued to shoot because Aldape was screaming and, "I had to finish it."

Quinones then fled and ended up wrecking his car a mile and a half away in the 500 block of Federal. He ran from the crash, leaving the murder weapon behind.

A woman who was with Aldape during the shooting drove him to Clear Lake Regional Medical Center, where he later died. The woman, who still had the shotgun in the car, tossed the weapon into the bushes, where police later recovered it.

Days after Aldape died, Quinones went to a Houston Police Department storefront to confess. After homicide detectives finished their investigation, Quinones was charged with capital murder. Because Quinones was 17 at the time of the shooting, he could have faced life in prison with the possibility of parole after 40 years.

As a part of the plea agreement, Quinones pleaded guilty to murder instead of capital murder and was sentenced to 35 years in prison, where he will serve at least half the sentence before he is eligible for parole. He is not allowed to appeal the conviction or the sentence.

If that is not enough, here is another example of senseless gun violence with someone who used a handgun to shoot and kill someone they thought was someone else.

Oscar Aristides Garcia, 35, pleaded guilty to murder in October 2022, and was sentenced to 35 years in prison for fleeing the country after shooting a man he thought was a thief in 2018.

Garcia was in his Pasadena transmission shop on October 28, 2018, when he saw the victim, Nicolas Bautista, 37, walk by with his girlfriend. The couple were on their way to a restaurant for Sunday brunch. Garcia mistakenly believed Bautista was a man that he had previously accused of stealing pickup tailgates from the shop. Bautista was never implicated in any theft, however, Garcia took a truck that he had been working on in the shop and a shotgun and followed Bautista and his girlfriend to confront him about the thefts. After finding that the restaurant near Garcia's shop was closed, Bautista and his girlfriend caught an Uber to another restaurant, with Garcia following them. After eating, they took another Uber home, and Garcia continued to follow. At their Pasadena home on Wafer Street, Garcia got out of the truck and started to argue with Bautista in Spanish. Bautista did

not speak Spanish, and his girlfriend told Garcia that he was mistaken. When Bautista turned around and walked away to call the police, Garcia shot him in the back, killing him. Garcia then leveled the gun at Bautista's girlfriend and pulled the trigger, but it did not fire. Garcia picked up the shell casing before fleeing to another mechanic's shop and demanding to store the truck inside that mechanic's garage. He then returned to his own shop and destroyed his security camera's recording device so there would be no record of Bautista walking by the shop. Garcia also broke into the neighborhood taqueria and destroyed its security camera's recording device, which showed him following Bautista. Garcia then closed the shop and left for his native land of El Salvador, leaving behind his pregnant wife and three children. He later sent for them, and they joined him there for a time. After more than two years, he returned to the U.S. and was arrested by U.S. marshals.

Prosecutors asked that Garcia be sentenced to 50 years in prison, but Garcia's defense team argued for a 15-year sentence. Garcia wanted the judge to sentence him, which is why he received the 35-year sentence by visiting Judge Marc Brown.

Lastly, on January 23rd, two men, believed to be in their 20s, were sitting inside of their vehicle at the gas pump when three masked men shot and killed them with AR-15-type weapons at a gas station in the 15300 block of Ella Boulevard this past Monday, according to the Harris County Sheriff's Office. Deputies believe that somewhere between 50 to 70 shots were fired at the two men, and a third passenger was shot and injured, but is expected to survive.

According to investigators, the three masked suspects took off in a white sedan, and are still at large. There has been no motive declared for the shooting.

As you can see, these incidents of gun violence, are ever-increasing, and are not going to stop if the community continues to be littered with guns, guns, and more guns.

There is a strong argument that can be made that these new gun laws don't benefit anyone.

According to a fact sheet produced by the Center for American Progress—an independent, nonpartisan policy institute—recent studies have found that these types of laws, in states like Texas, are associated with double-digit increases in homicides and violent crime.

As a matter of fact, here are some startling statistics about the correlation between this legislation and gun crimes according to the Center for American Progress:

- A 2022 analysis found that states with permitless carry laws saw a 22 percent increase in gun homicide for the three years following the law's passage.
- A 2022 study found that firearm violent crime rises 29 percent after a state introduces a right-to-carry law, with firearm robbery rates experiencing the largest increase.
- A 2022 study by leading researchers Philip Cook and John Donahue found that a state passing a right-to-carry (RTC) law "elevates gun thefts by roughly 35 percent, introducing tens of thousands of guns into the hands of criminals or illegal gun markets each year.

- A 2022 study found that states weakening concealed carry laws and allowing individuals convicted of violent misdemeanors to obtain a license to concealed carry was associated with a 24 percent increase in the rate of assaults with firearms.
- A 2022 study found that right-to-carry laws increase firearm homicides by 13 percent and firearm violent crimes by 29 percent.
- A 2022 study found that 10 states who removed requirements to carry a concealed handgun from 2014 to 2020 experienced a 12.9 percent average increase in officer-involved shootings.
- A 2021 study concluded that firearm homicide rates are higher in states with more permissive concealed carry laws. The study found that more permissive concealed carry legislation is associated with an 11 percent increase in firearm homicide rates.
- A 2019 study concluded that the adoption of right-to-carry laws were associated with a 13 percent to 15 percent increase in violent crime rates a decade after implementation.
- A 2019 study found that right-to-carry laws were associated with a 29 percent increase in firearm workplace homicides.
- A 2017 study found that shall issue laws were associated with a 10.6 percent higher handgun homicide rate.
- A 2017 study found that gun owners who carried their guns during the previous months were three times more likely to have their firearms stolen than other gun owners.
- Injuries and deaths from gun-related road rage incidents increased from 263 in 2017 to 522 in 2021.

Here is some additional eye-opening information about gun crimes according to the Center for American Progress:

- A majority of Texans oppose allowing legal gun owners over the age of 21 to carry handguns in most public places without a license or training, according to an October 2021 poll.
- An April 2021 Pew Research poll found that only 20 percent of U.S. adults favored allowing people to carry concealed guns without a permit. This includes only 8 percent of Democrats and 35 percent of Republicans.
- A 2017 Johns Hopkins University poll found that 83 percent of gun owners agreed "... that a person who can legally carry a concealed gun should be required to pass a test demonstrating they can safely and lawfully handle a gun in common situations they might encounter."
- Thirty-seven percent of U.S. households are in the Southern region, but two-thirds of guns stolen in the U.S. are from the South.
- Seventy-four percent of firearms researchers who are knowledgeable about concealed carry literature disagree with the claim that weakening concealed carry requirements have reduced crime rates.
- States with more permissive concealed carry laws have higher gun homicide rates than states with regulations that provide law enforcement agencies the discretion to deny concealed carry weapon licenses.

- An analysis of 111 mass shootings from 1966 to 2015 where six or more people were fatally shot found that states who implemented right-to-carry laws saw the average death toll in high-fatality mass shootings increase from an average of 7.5 before the law to 8.4 after.
- Opportunities for gun thefts increase when states weaken requirements to carry a concealed firearm and allow more people to legally carry firearms outside the home without a permit.
- The dramatic rise in gun thefts from vehicles has increased the supply of illegal firearms, making it cheaper and easier for prohibited individuals to illegally obtain guns.

So, the fact of the matter is, scientific research and real-time statistics are showing us that this freelance legislation increases violent crime, firearm robberies, gun thefts, gun homicides, workplace homicides, and mass shootings by making it easier for almost anyone to carry a concealed handgun in public without a license, without a permit, or without the necessary training to use that dangerous weapon.

And African Americans, of all cultural groups, should continue to be cognizant about how these new gun laws that are in place do not directly benefit our community at all, and in most cases is a set-up waiting to happen.

In July 2022, the Forward Times published an article entitled "*Journey Like No Other*" where a local family who had been advocating to end gun violence after the tragic murder of their son nearly 10 years ago was invited to White House by President Joe Biden for the signing of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.

As part of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the Biden Administration promised to address the epidemic of gun violence by enacting certain steps and proposing \$32 billion in additional funding to fight crime, with \$20.6 billion in discretionary funding for federal law enforcement and state and local law enforcement and crime prevention programs. President Biden also called on cities and states to use American Rescue Plan funding to reduce gun crime and other violent crime by investing in more community violence intervention and prevention programs.

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