



600 Jefferson, Suite 400 | Memphis TN 38105
901.527.2600 – Fax 901-577-0286 | www.memphiscrime.org

Statement by the Crime Commission Board of Directors Adopted March 4, 2020

A key objective of the local Safe Community Plan is a reduction in gun violence.

To achieve that objective, the Crime Commission has supported (1) the successful enactment of tougher state sentences for the illegal possession of guns by convicted felons, (2) strong prosecution efforts at both the federal and state levels for gun crimes, and (3) a communication campaign (called FED UP) to communicate the consequences of engaging in gun crime.

Governor Bill Lee has proposed to this year's General Assembly (1) legislation that would allow the carrying of a handgun – openly or concealed – without a handgun permit and (2) enhanced sentences for those convicted of stealing guns and convicted felons in possession of guns.

For the reasons set forth below, we OPPOSE the handgun carry proposal and SUPPORT the proposed enhanced sentences for gun theft and felons in possession of guns.

Tennessee has a handgun permit system under which over a half million Tennesseans have obtained permits after proper training and background checks. Simply put, the handgun carry proposal would gut our handgun permit system. Absent some other prohibition such as a felony conviction or domestic violence conviction, individuals would be able to arm themselves with handguns – unconcealed or concealed – with no training or background checks.

According to FBI figures, Tennessee ranks third in the nation in its violent crime rate. The Safe Tennessee Project report released last year calls gun violence a “public health crisis” and notes that an average of over three Tennesseans are killed with guns every day. The report notes that Memphis is 7th in the nation in the number of homicides per 100,000 and that Nashville ranks 20th. Drive-by shootings and road rage incidents are of major concern to citizens and law enforcement in the Memphis community. Already this year, 11 interstate shootings have been reported in Memphis. For residents in far too many Memphis neighborhoods, gun violence is a day-to-day threat and concern. Too many of our children witness gun violence or become victims. The increased stress and anxiety placed on many of our children result in adverse childhood experiences that will affect them the rest of their lives.

Memphis and other communities are plagued by gun violence, much of which is attributable to criminal gang activity. Passage of the handgun carry proposal will mean that many criminal gang members will be able to legally carry handguns without a permit! There will be more guns in the wrong hands, with increased gun violence the inevitable result.

We support our state's handgun permit system and efforts to reduce the number of guns in the wrong hands. We oppose the handgun carry proposal and urge the General Assembly to defeat it.

We commend Governor Lee for proposing tougher sentences for theft of guns and convicted felons in possession of guns.

The Governor proposes to make theft of a gun a felony (currently a misdemeanor if the value of the gun is under \$1,000) and require mandatory incarceration time of at least 180 days upon conviction. Since the General Assembly enacted legislation in 2013 to allow handguns in motor vehicles without a permit, reported gun thefts from motor vehicles in Memphis have skyrocketed – from less than 400 in 2013 to almost 1300 in 2018. Simply put, it did not take the criminals long to figure out that the change in the law meant more guns in motor vehicles. Far too often, stolen guns are, in turn, used to commit crimes.

If communicated effectively to the street level, we believe the Governor's proposed change in the state's law for theft of guns can have a deterrent effect and reduce the number of stolen guns. We support this change in our state law.

The Governor's proposal would also limit parole eligibility upon conviction as a felon in possession of a gun. As part of the Safe Community Plan, the Crime Commission successfully supported enhanced sentences for felons in possession of guns when their former convictions were for violent crimes or felony drug offenses. We support this additional step as well to deter convicted felons from possessing guns.

In considering changes in state law involving guns, we urge our state legislators to always ask themselves whether a change is likely to increase gun violence or reduce it and consistently take action to reduce such violence.