
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE BILL

No. 59 Session of
2023

INTRODUCED BY HUGHES, KEARNEY, FONTANA, SCHWANK, KANE, DILLON,
TARTAGLIONE, STREET, COSTA, SANTARSIERO, COMMITTA AND
CAPPELLETTI, JANUARY 19, 2023

REFERRED TO STATE GOVERNMENT, JANUARY 19, 2023

AN ACT

1 Providing for the establishment and funding of a center to
2 conduct research on gun violence in this Commonwealth.

3 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
4 hereby enacts as follows:

5 Section 1. Short title.

6 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Center for
7 Gun Violence Research Act.

8 Section 2. Findings.

9 The General Assembly finds and declares the following:

10 (1) Gun violence is a significant public health crisis
11 and public safety problem in this Commonwealth and
12 nationwide. Nationally, rates of fatal gun violence have
13 remained essentially unchanged for more than a decade, as
14 declines in homicide have been offset by increases in
15 suicide.

16 (2) For the decade ending in 2010, Pennsylvania had
17 12,941 gun-related deaths, which ranked fourth highest in the

1 United States. During that same decade, the rate of gun
2 homicides among children and teens in this Commonwealth
3 ranked as one of the highest in the nation.

4 (3) The annual cost of gun violence across the United
5 States is estimated to be more than \$100 billion and could be
6 as high as \$229 billion per year.

7 (4) Too little is known about gun violence, its causes
8 and the best practices for its prevention. There is a
9 substantial need for publicly funded academic research in gun
10 violence. The need for more research and more sophisticated
11 research is critical in fighting the plague of gun violence
12 in our schools and communities.

13 (5) Federal funding for gun violence research through
14 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was
15 effectively eliminated by Congress in 1996 through the
16 passage of a provision known as the Dickey Amendment.

17 (6) It is the intent of this act to provide State
18 funding for gun violence research in place of the Federal
19 funding that has been curtailed by the Dickey Amendment.

20 Section 3. Definitions.

21 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall
22 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
23 context clearly indicates otherwise:

24 "Center." The Center for Gun Violence Research established
25 under section 4.

26 "University." Any of the following:

27 (1) An independent institution of higher education
28 located in and incorporated or chartered by the Commonwealth,
29 entitled to confer degrees as set forth in 24 Pa.C.S. § 6505
30 (relating to power to confer degrees) and entitled to apply

1 to itself the designation "college," "university" or
2 "seminary" as provided for by standards and qualifications
3 prescribed by the State Board of Education under 24 Pa.C.S.
4 Ch. 65 (relating to private colleges, universities and
5 seminaries).

6 (2) A State-owned institution.

7 (3) A State-related institution.

8 Section 4. Center for Gun Violence Research.

9 (a) Establishment.--The Center for Gun Violence Research is
10 established as a research center for gun violence in this
11 Commonwealth. The center shall be administered by a university
12 selected by the Governor under section 5(i).

13 (b) Mission.--The center's mission shall be to conduct
14 independent academic research on gun violence in this
15 Commonwealth and to provide policymakers, including the General
16 Assembly, the Governor, State agencies and local governments
17 with scientific evidence to develop sound gun violence
18 prevention policies and programs.

19 (c) Nonpartisan research.--The center shall conduct research
20 on a nonpartisan basis.

21 Section 5. Location of center.

22 (a) Request for proposals.--Proposals for the location and
23 operation of the center shall be solicited through a request for
24 proposals.

25 (b) Public notice.--Public notice of the request for
26 proposals shall be given in the same manner as provided under 62
27 Pa.C.S. § 512(c) (relating to competitive sealed bidding).

28 (c) Receipt of proposals.--Universities shall submit
29 proposals in the form and time period as established by the
30 evaluation committee established under subsection (e).

1 (d) Opening of proposals.--Proposals shall be opened in a
2 manner which avoids disclosure of the proposal's contents to
3 competing offerors.

4 (e) Evaluation committee.--An evaluation committee is
5 established to review all proposals and make recommendations to
6 the Governor as provided under subsection (h). The committee
7 shall be comprised of the following members:

8 (1) The Attorney General of the Commonwealth.

9 (2) The Secretary of Corrections.

10 (3) The Secretary of Education.

11 (4) The Secretary of Health.

12 (5) The Secretary of Human Services.

13 (6) The chair of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime
14 and Delinquency.

15 (7) The Commissioner of Pennsylvania State Police.

16 (f) Evaluation criteria.--The relative importance of the
17 evaluation factors shall be fixed prior to opening the
18 proposals. No individual who has been employed within the
19 preceding two years by an applying university may participate in
20 the evaluation of proposals.

21 (g) Discussion with responsible offerors and revision of
22 proposals.--The following shall apply:

23 (1) As provided in the request for proposals, the
24 evaluation committee may hold discussions with a university
25 for purposes of reviewing and clarifying the university's
26 proposal.

27 (2) A university shall be accorded fair and equal
28 treatment with respect to any opportunity for discussion,
29 review or revision of a proposal.

30 (3) In conducting a discussion under paragraph (1), the

1 evaluation committee shall not disclose any information
2 derived from proposals submitted by competing universities.

3 (h) Recommendation to Governor.--The two universities whose
4 proposals are determined in writing to be the most advantageous
5 to the Commonwealth for carrying out the intent of this act and
6 the mission of the center shall be recommended to the Governor
7 for final selection.

8 (i) Selection by Governor.--Within 10 days of receipt of the
9 recommendations under subsection (h), the Governor shall select
10 the university to operate the center.

11 Section 6. Duties.

12 (a) General rule.--The center shall work on a continuing
13 basis with the Governor, the General Assembly and local
14 governments to identify, implement and evaluate innovative gun
15 violence prevention policies and programs.

16 (b) Methods.--The center shall conduct basic, translational
17 and transformative research using scientific-based methods to
18 develop and analyze gun violence prevention policies and
19 programs.

20 (c) Research.--The center shall conduct interdisciplinary
21 research that shall, at a minimum, include the following:

22 (1) The nature of gun violence, including individual and
23 societal determinants of risk for involvement in gun
24 violence, whether as a victim or a perpetrator.

25 (2) The individual, community and societal consequences
26 of gun violence.

27 (3) Prevention and treatment of gun violence at the
28 individual, community and societal levels.

29 (4) Effectiveness of existing laws and policies intended
30 to reduce gun violence, including the criminal misuse of

1 firearms and efforts to promote responsible ownership and
2 firearm use.

3 (5) Analysis of data and statistics of gun-related crime
4 that occurs in this Commonwealth.

5 (6) The financial impact of gun violence on this
6 Commonwealth, political subdivisions, hospitals, social
7 service agencies and other entities impacted by gun violence.

8 (d) Cooperation.--Unless specifically prohibited by law,
9 each State agency, county district attorney's office, local
10 police department and county or municipal health department
11 shall provide to the center, upon request, the data necessary
12 for the center to conduct the research required under this act.

13 (e) Reports.--Biennially, the center shall submit a report
14 to the Governor and the General Assembly on the center's
15 activities, including research projects completed during the
16 prior two years, current research projects and other information
17 the center deems relevant.

18 (f) Internet website.--The center shall maintain a publicly
19 accessible Internet website and post all of the center's
20 completed research.

21 Section 7. Funding.

22 (a) General Assembly.--The General Assembly shall annually
23 provide an appropriation to fund the activities of the center.

24 (b) Grants.--The following shall apply:

25 (1) The center may supplement the center's own research
26 by awarding competitive grants to nonprofit organizations
27 that conduct gun violence research.

28 (2) All research money shall be awarded on scientific
29 merit as determined by an open and competitive peer review
30 process that ensures objectivity, consistency and high

1 quality. All qualified investigators, regardless of
2 institutional affiliation, shall have equal access and
3 opportunity to compete for grant money.

4 (3) The peer review process for the selection of grants
5 awarded under this section shall be modeled on the grant
6 making process used by the National Institutes of Health.

7 (4) Grants awarded under this subsection shall be made
8 from the appropriation provided by the General Assembly.

9 (c) Research by grantees.--Research completed by a nonprofit
10 organization through a grant awarded under subsection (b) shall:

11 (1) belong to the center;

12 (2) be posted on the center's publicly accessible
13 Internet website; and

14 (3) be distributed to the Governor and the General
15 Assembly.

16 (d) Submission for funding.--The university housing the
17 center shall, on an annual basis, submit a request for funding
18 to the Office of the Budget for inclusion in the Governor's
19 budget proposal. Funding for the center shall appear as a
20 separate line item in the Governor's proposed budget.

21 Section 8. Effective date.

22 This act shall take effect in 60 days.