

SENATE BILL 2960

By Akbari

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 38;
Title 39 and Title 40, relative to gun violence.

WHEREAS, it is essential that the elected leaders of this State and the nation strive to ensure the safety and well-being of all children, youth, and families; and

WHEREAS, as gun violence has risen to the forefront of public consciousness, far less attention has been dedicated to the impact of gun violence on victims, particularly those persons of lower socioeconomic status who have been disproportionately impacted by gun violence; and

WHEREAS, the consequences of gun violence are more pervasive and affect entire communities, families, and children. With more than 25% of children witnessing an act of violence in their homes, schools, or community over the past year, and more than 5% witnessing a shooting, it becomes not just an issue of gun regulation, but also of addressing the impact on those who have been traumatized by such violence; and

WHEREAS, children exposed to gun violence may experience negative short- and long-term psychological effects, including anger, withdrawal, post traumatic stress, and desensitization to violence, including children injured in gun violence, those who witness violent acts at close proximity, those exposed to high levels of violence in their communities or schools, and those exposed to violent media; and

WHEREAS, addressing the social, emotional, and mental health needs of our population of lower socioeconomic status who are exposed to gun violence is a complex process that requires proper identification of those exposed, providers trained in age-appropriate, evidence-based, and trauma-informed treatments; and

WHEREAS, unfortunately gun ownership is often associated with the devastating violence that takes place in communities around the country—especially those in which there is a high poverty rate, which can increase the difficulty of preventing gun-based crime; and

WHEREAS, children and youth living in violent neighborhoods feel most at risk; without nonviolent conflict-resolution skills, they too readily depend on guns to solve problems; and

WHEREAS, such exposure to gun violence can also desensitize youth to the effects of violence and increase the likelihood that they will use violence as a means of resolving problems or expressing emotions; and

WHEREAS, only when all facets of society recognize the true negative impact that exposure to gun violence has on the well-being of our children, youth, families, and communities, and actively work to address this problem, will substantive change take place; and

WHEREAS, it is incumbent on this legislative body to find ways to reduce the numbers of children and youth who are initially exposed to gun violence, including the initiation of a dialogue about the often ignored impact of gun violence on the well-being of children, youth, families, and communities; and

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly must work to broaden the focus of the gun debate to include the social, emotional, physical, and mental health impact of those traumatized by gun violence, especially children and youth; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. There is created a committee to study the impacts of gun violence in communities in this state, prioritizing those that are of lower socioeconomic status and who have been disproportionately impacted by gun violence, such as minority communities.

SECTION 2. The goal of the study is to determine what state laws need updating or revising to better ensure the safety of citizens in response to the proliferation of gun violence in this state.

SECTION 3.

The study committee shall consist of five (5) members as follows:

- (1) One (1) person who is a member of the district attorneys general conference to be appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives;
- (2) One (1) person who is a criminal defense attorney to be appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives;
- (3) One (1) person who is a member of the district public defenders conference to be appointed by the speaker of the senate;
- (4) One (1) person who is a member of the Tennessee judicial conference to be appointed by the speaker of the senate; and
- (5) The commissioner of correction or the commissioner's designee.

SECTION 4. The members shall not receive compensation for serving on the study committee but shall be reimbursed for attendance at meetings in accordance with the comprehensive travel regulations promulgated by the commissioner of finance and administration and approved by the attorney general and reporter.

SECTION 5. The study committee shall be convened by the commissioner of correction or the commissioner's designee, and at its first meeting the study committee shall elect a chair, vice chair, and such officers as the study committee deems necessary.

SECTION 6. At the request of the study committee, the various agencies and entities of state government shall assist the study committee in the performance of its duties.

SECTION 7. The study committee shall timely report its initial findings and recommendations to the criminal justice committee of the house of representatives and the judiciary committee of the senate by December 1, 2024, including any proposed legislation. The study committee shall issue a final report by February 1, 2025, at which time the study committee shall cease to exist.

SECTION 8. This act takes effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.