March 8, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA), I write to express our support of H.R. 8 / S.529 the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2021. This important legislation would address our nation’s gun violence public health crisis by closing pre-existing loopholes that allow for unlicensed gun sellers to avoid comprehensive background checks on firearms sales.

APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States with nearly 122,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students. Our mission is to advance the creation, communication, and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people’s lives. APA advocates for a public health approach to gun violence prevention, supporting evidence-based programs and policies that can reduce the occurrence and impact of firearm-related violence in the United States.

Research demonstrates almost 80% of all firearms acquired for criminal purposes are obtained through transfers from unlicensed sellers, and 96% of persons incarcerated for gun offenses who were already prohibited from possessing a firearm at the time of the offense obtained their firearm from an unlicensed seller. Moreover, states that only require background checks on sales through federally licensed firearms dealers showed higher rates of adolescents who carry guns than states that require universal background checks on all prospective gun buyers.\(^i\)

Thank you for your work to prevent gun violence tragedies. If you have any questions, please contact Ben Vonachen, Senior Director of Congressional and Federal Relations at bvonachen@apa.org.

Sincerely,

Brian D. Smedley, Ph.D.  
Chief of Psychology in the Public Interest  
American Psychological Association

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\(^ii\) Lava R. Timsina, Nan Qiao, Alejandro C. Mongalo, Ashley N. Vetor, Aaron E. Carroll and Teresa M. Bell, “National Instant Criminal Background Check and Youth Gun Carrying” Pediatrics January 2020, 145 (1) e20191071; DOI: https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-1071