

## **NM can do something to prevent mass shootings**

*Assault rifle ban/higher age requirement, improved threat assessment will save lives*

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“We must do something!” That’s a common plea heard in response to the horrific loss of life in Tulsa, Uvalde and Buffalo.

New Mexico can “do something.” We can take steps to minimize the risk of mass shootings by making one of the most deadly weapons less accessible and by improving threat assessment.

As a former prosecutor and as a psychologist, we know violent crime is devastating for victims and their loved ones. To reduce violent crime, Matthews sponsored legislation in the 2022 session to strengthen pretrial release rules for those charged with violent felonies. Baron has advocated since Columbine in 1999 for sensible and constitutional gun safety legislation.

Among the most deadly weapons available for purchase by civilians in the U.S. are assault rifles like the AR-15, which is America’s most popular semi-automatic weapon. The sole purpose of an assault weapon is to kill multiple people rapidly. It’s a military weapon! They should be banned from civilian use, along with the bullets they fire. While the federal assault-weapon ban was in place, 1994-2004, gun deaths fell 37%; they rose 183% after the ban expired.

AR-15 bullets travel three times the velocity of one fired by a 9 mm handgun, and the magazines can feed dozens of rounds into the weapon in the space of minutes. The speed at which it can fire reportedly can be three rounds per second, or as fast as someone can repeatedly pull the trigger. An often-purchased magazine size holds 30 rounds, but a highercapacity magazine can hold more than 60 rounds.

The bullets are ferocious. They can penetrate several walls and standard police body armor. The bullets are usually .223 Remington cartridges that can cause an entrance wound just under a quarter-inch in diameter. We saw the tragic evidence of this power when identification of many of the young Uvalde victims required DNA samples from their parents.

There are an estimated 20 million assault style rifles in the United States, about one in every 20 privately held guns.

Currently under federal law, you only have to be 18 to purchase a rifle, including assault rifles, which are much higher capacity weapons. Assault rifles are particularly dangerous in the hands of individuals younger than 21 because their brain and impulse control are not fully developed. In fact, in six of the nine most deadly mass shootings in the U.S. since 2018, the shooters were 21 or younger.

We are advocating for a total ban on the sale of assault rifles in New Mexico for the reasons set forth above, but at a minimum we should prohibit those younger than 21 from being able to purchase or possess these weapons.

Many of the recent individuals behind recent mass shootings espoused hatred and made threats of violence online before carrying out these horrific acts. New Mexico should also consider improving its threat assessment capacity by creating a Social Media Violent Threats Monitoring capacity to identify and investigate credible threats of physical violence.

The time to “do something” in New Mexico is now. Let’s make it happen.



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