



January 15, 2021

Esteemed Members of the General Assembly of Virginia,

From the United States Capitol to the lawn of the Virginia Capitol complex to the streets of Charlottesville, residents of the Commonwealth have borne witness to the rise and escalation of armed extremism. The armed attack at the U.S. Capitol on January 6 was just the most recent in a string of threatening and violent intrusions into public and legislative spaces by rioters, extremists, and members of far-right militia groups. And make no mistake: the tragic events of last week would have been far worse absent D.C.'s strong gun laws that prohibit open carry of all firearms. **In this urgent moment, we are calling for a ban on open carry in the Commonwealth of Virginia. There is simply [no legitimate reason to open carry guns in public.](#)**

We know that lawmakers are no strangers to these threats: when approximately 20,000 gun rights supporters, many of whom were open carrying assault-style rifles, converged in Richmond on Martin Luther King Jr. Day last year, it was the legislative promise to pass a gun violence prevention package that stoked their fury. While not all members of the crowd that day were violent, there were prominent appearances by the Proud Boys, and many white nationalists who attended Charlottesville's "Unite the Right" rally in 2017. Many legislators were personally targeted with violent threats by these extremists.

The proliferation of these events -- where individuals use firearms for the express purposes of intimidation and coercion -- should alarm us all. When extremists are armed, they jeopardize the safety of all residents trying to exercise their freedoms -- and simply live their daily lives -- in public. The sheer presence of firearms has the effect of chilling the exercise of Americans' First Amendment right to assembly and freedom of speech. When firearms are brought to polling places, they are used as tools of voter suppression that have proliferated in recent years.

We recognize and affirm that guns have no place in our political discourse, and this issue should be of the utmost importance to lawmakers who wish to preserve the sacred democratic process of lawmaking. Legislators took an important step in 2020 in passing a rule outlawing the carry of firearms inside the state Capitol and surrounding legislative buildings. But Virginians across the Commonwealth deserve that same preservation of peace without fear from intimidation. **This is why the undersigned organizations are calling for a complete ban on the open carry of firearms in Virginia.**

Our organizations deeply appreciate the work that legislators have done to strengthen Virginia's gun laws to make the residents of, and visitors to, the Commonwealth safer. But we must not stop there; we must ensure that when making their voice heard on an important issue, when voting, peacefully protesting, shopping at a farmer's market, or going for a walk in their community, all Virginians are safe from the threat and intimidation of open carry of firearms. Now is the time to take decisive action.

Respectfully,

Brady: United Against Gun Violence
Coalition to Stop Gun Violence
Everytown for Gun Safety
Giffords: Courage to Fight Gun Violence

If you have any questions or request any additional information, please feel welcome to reach out to any of the below:

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