



THE LORI JACKSON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR PROTECTION ACT

Background:

Domestic violence—an issue that affects one in four women nationwide—is a horrific scourge that happens behind closed doors every day across the United States. Congressional inaction on this issue is not only unacceptable—it has cost lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents profound challenges domestic violence victims and survivors. Evidence shows that domestic violence increases during prolonged periods of crisis and financial stress and stay-at-home orders related to COVID-19 have forced victims and survivors of domestic violence into increasingly dangerous situations. These orders, while necessary to reduce the spread of contracting COVID-19, have made it difficult for individuals to call domestic violence hotlines or to visit shelters and other safe locations. Some local enforcement offices have seen spikes in domestic violence calls notwithstanding these difficulties.¹ Perhaps more alarmingly, in more dense areas, such as New York and Los Angeles, advocates report significant declines in contacts, likely because victims are unable to seek help.²

The increase in domestic violence incidents is compounded by the surge in gun sales since the beginning of the pandemic. Since March 2020, almost three million more firearms were purchased than would have ordinarily been sold in this time period.³ The link between domestic violence and guns is not only well-documented—it is also deadly.⁴

Therefore, as a result of COVID-19, there is renewed urgency to close two longstanding gaps in federal gun laws. First, federal law prevents abusers from purchasing or possessing a firearm—but only once a court has issued a *permanent* restraining order. This leaves victims unprotected exactly when they are in the most danger: when a domestic abuser first learns their victim has left them and only a *temporary* restraining order is in place. Second, federal law currently limits the definition of the “intimate partner[s],” who are precluded from possessing firearms when subject to a restraining order, to spouses, former spouses, people with a child in common, and cohabitants. There are, however, many survivors who remain unprotected simply because they were never married, do not live with their abuser, or have no children.

Proposal:

The Lori Jackson Domestic Violence Survivor Protection Act would close these gaps in federal law by preventing those subject to a temporary restraining order from purchasing or possessing a firearm and by extending protections to domestic violence survivors who have been abused by their dating partners.

The Lori Jackson Domestic Violence Survivor Protection Act is named in memory of Lori Jackson, an Oxford, Connecticut mother of two who was tragically shot and killed by her estranged husband, who had legally obtained a handgun under a temporary restraining order.

¹ Rachel Bucchino, *Domestic Violence Cases Surge Amid Stay-at-Home Orders*, THE HILL (Apr. 13, 2020), <https://thehill.com/homenews/news/492506-domestic-violence-cases-surge-amid-stay-at-home-orders>.

² Julie Bosman, *Domestic Violence Calls Mount as Restricts Linger: ‘No One Can Leave’*, N.Y. TIMES (May 15, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/15/us/domestic-violence-coronavirus.html?referringSource=articleShare>.

³ Phillip Levine and Robin McKnight, *Three Million More Guns: The Spring 2020 Spike in Firearm Sales*, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION (July 13, 2020), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/07/13/three-million-more-guns-the-spring-2020-spike-in-firearm-sales/>.

⁴ EVERYTOWN FOR GUN SAFETY, *GUN VIOLENCE AND COVID-19: COLLIDING PUBLIC HEALTH CRISES* (June 17, 2020), <https://everytownresearch.org/reports/covid-gun-violence/>.