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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Ramsey County leaders lay out holistic approach to gun safety**

*Call for state and federal action, violence prevention, and expand gun lock program*

Saint Paul, MN – Ramsey County leaders outlined a series of measures aimed at reducing the growing challenge around the prevalence of guns in our community through a combined response to prevent violence, provide mental health support, and keep firearms out of the reach of children. Policy leaders emphasized the need for Federal and state officials to enact stronger measures around access to assault-style weapons and background checks on private firearm sales, and a legal pathway for families and others to temporarily remove firearms from an individual who is exhibiting erratic and violent behavior.

“For too long, we’ve listened to the voices that say there is nothing that can be done after each new gun death of an individual, or in mass shootings we have already experienced in our region,” said Ramsey County Board Chair Trista MatasCastillo. “Yet there are common-sense, effective solutions that we can take together to address the national public health crisis of gun violence.”

County leaders expressed optimism about gun safety proposals currently being discussed in Congress and called on Federal and state legislators to take action now. They also called on legislators to take further steps outlined in the county’s federal and state legislative priorities to reinstate the assault rifle ban further, expand background checks, and upstream investments in violence prevention and mental health services.

“Gun violence is a public health crisis that affects everyone in our community and disproportionately impacts racially and ethnically diverse communities and residents,” said Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health Director Sara Hollie. “The Public Health department in partnership with the Healing Streets Program takes a community-center approach to work upstream on violence prevention, mental health wellness and promotion, intervention and healing from gun violence.”

Prevention is also the guiding principle in the county’s free gun lock program. With school out for the summer and children spending more time at home, Ramsey County is expanding its [Gun Lock Distribution](#) program to each of the Ramsey County service centers in Maplewood, Roseville and Saint Paul. Organized as part of the Ramsey County [Gun Safety Initiative](#), the

distribution program offers community members the chance to pick up a free gun lock at a community-based location no questions asked.

“A gun lock can be the difference between life and death if a child accidentally gets a hold of a firearm,” said Ramsey County Attorney John Choi. “This summer, with kids home from school, parents who have guns in their home have an important responsibility to take a few minutes to lock and secure their firearms to prevent these heartbreaking incidents from happening.”

Nationwide there are weekly, preventable shootings in which children access unsecured guns and pulled the trigger, shooting themselves, other children, a parent or family member, often with fatal results. According to the Pew Research Center, 40 percent of adults live in a household where guns are present, with nearly 50 percent of gun-owning households leaving firearms loaded and unlocked. And, in 2020, gun violence overtook motor vehicle accidents as the leading cause of death around children and young people, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Note: Contact Dennis Gerhardstein for additional information.