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**ABOUT 594**

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**Q: What is Initiative 594?**

A: Initiative 594 is an initiative to the legislature that requires criminal background checks for all gun sales. It is very simple: it makes sure everyone buying a gun in Washington State passes the same background check, no matter where they buy the gun and no matter whom they buy it from.

Criminals and others prohibited from buying a gun can currently buy guns from private sellers with no questions asked. Initiative 594 closes this loophole in Washington State by requiring that private sales and transfers—including those at gun shows or through the internet—go through the same background check process as sales through a licensed gun dealer.

**Q: Who is sponsoring the initiative?**

A: The Washington Alliance for Gun Responsibility. The alliance is a coalition of concerned citizens, including gun owners, working to reduce gun violence and promote gun responsibility in Washington State. This is a grassroots campaign funded by over 2,000 citizen donors. It has been endorsed by the Washington State Public Health Association, Faith Action Network, the Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Moms Demand Action and dozens of other community organizations. You can find out more at [www.wagunresponsibility.org](http://www.wagunresponsibility.org).

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**WHY WE NEED BACKGROUND CHECKS FOR ALL GUN SALES**

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**Q: Why support criminal background checks for all gun sales and transfers?**

A: 8 out of 10 Washington voters support background checks. Background checks are vital to public safety because they stop felons, domestic abusers, the seriously mentally ill, and other dangerous people from buying guns. The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) has stopped over 2 million gun sales to people who are prohibited from possessing guns. But the current system has a gaping loophole that criminals exploit. Prohibited purchasers can avoid background checks by buying firearms from unlicensed “private sellers” — often at gun shows or at online stores — who are not required to conduct them.

**Q: Do dangerous people obtain guns through private sales?**

A: Yes. A survey of prisoners who committed crimes with handguns found that nearly 80 percent of them got those guns through private transfers. Many prohibited purchasers are evading background checks by acquiring guns through “private” channels.

**Q: Background checks didn’t stop the shooters at Tucson, Aurora, Newtown or in our local tragedies. Why burden private sellers if checks won’t stop mass shooters?**

**A:** Gun violence is a very complex issue, and we acknowledge that there is no single law that can stop all gun deaths, but there are reasonable steps we can take that will save lives and reduce crime while protecting 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Rights. And there is already proof that background checks keep guns out of dangerous hands: since its creation in 1998, the background check system has blocked more than 2 million gun sales to people prohibited from buying them. Countless crimes have been prevented in our communities because those 2 million guns were not sold to dangerous people.

**Q: Don't criminals just buy their guns on the black market?**

**A:** Background checks block sales to people prohibited from buying them. But some criminals attempt to avoid background checks, which is exactly why we need a law to make it harder to evade the system. Right now, anyone can simply find a private seller online, at a gun show, or in a classified ad, and purchase a gun with no questions asked. 594 will close off these channels to criminals.

## **HOW 594 WILL WORK**

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**Q: How will private sellers conduct background checks?**

**A:** Private sellers will conduct background checks through licensed dealers using the same system those dealers use every day for their gun sales. It's that simple.

**Q: Are there any exceptions to the background check requirement?**

**A:** Yes. Initiative 594 provides for several common sense exceptions to the background check requirements, including gifts between immediate family members and loans for lawful hunting or sporting activities.

**Q: How will these checks affect law-abiding citizens?**

**A:** The rights of law-abiding gun owners will not be affected. They will still be able to buy the same guns they can buy today. They'll simply have to pass an instant background check -- the same check they would have to pass if they bought the gun from a licensed dealer.

**Q: Will people be forced to travel long distances to get a background check at a dealer?**

**A:** For most, finding a licensed gun dealer is more convenient than finding a post office. As of January 2013, there are twice as many licensed gun dealers in Washington as there are US post offices. And 98% of Washingtonians live within 10 miles of a dealer.

**Q: Will background checks create a national registry of gun owners?**

**A:** No. The federal government is legally prohibited from creating a registry of any kind. 594 would simply make the current background check system and its sales records requirements applicable to private sales. Under that system, background checks submitted to NICS are destroyed within 24 hours.

