



**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
District Attorney's Office  
Inter-Office Communication

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DATE: February 17, 2021

TO: Marcella Nicholson, Chairperson, County Board of Supervisors  
Supervisor, Sequanna Taylor, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chairperson  
Supervisor Ryan Clancy  
Supervisor Felesia Martin  
Supervisor Jason Haas

FROM: John Chisholm, District Attorney

RE: From The District Attorney Regarding 2022 Budget Amendment 1A001, an Informational Report on the Potential Viability of a Gun Buyback Program

The County Board asked the Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office to prepare a report on the potential viability of a gun buyback program. It is our opinion that gun buyback programs are not particularly effective from a public safety standpoint. There are other methods, such as the distribution and use of gun locks, that better promote public safety. Gun locks go over the trigger, locking it, thus preventing the firearm from being fired. Gun locks can prevent accidental shooting deaths and injuries as well as limit access to loaded firearms to children.

Historically, buyback programs in Milwaukee County have not been particularly productive at curbing gun violence. A study published in *Injury Prevention* in 2002 found that handguns recovered from buyback programs in Milwaukee County between 1994 and 1996 were not the types of firearms that were most commonly linked to firearm fatalities.<sup>1</sup> The study compared 941 handguns recovered in Milwaukee County during those buyback programs with 369 homicide and 125 suicide related handguns used in Milwaukee between 1994 and 1997. The study found that certain types of firearms are more likely to be used in violent crime and that the handguns recovered during the buyback programs "differed substantially from those used in homicide and suicide" related fatalities. For example, two thirds of the homicide related handguns

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<sup>1</sup> Kuhn EM, Nie CL, O'Brien ME, *et al* Missing the target: a comparison of buyback and fatality related guns. *Injury Prevention* 2002;8:143-146.

were semi-automatic pistols compared with the one third of buyback handguns that were semi-automatic.

The study also found that homicide and suicide related handguns differed from buyback handguns in other areas such as caliber, manufacturer and age of the firearm itself. That same study looked at buyback programs in other large, urban areas, finding that the characteristics of handguns recovered in those areas differed from those related to fatalities as well. The study concluded that “the results suggest that these programs may not be effective in convincing the people at greatest risk of perpetrating such violence to turn in their firearms” and that while “[g]un buyback programs may increase public awareness of the problem of gun violence . . . limited resources for firearm injury prevention programs may be better spent in other ways.”

The County provides significant funding to the City in order to supply gunlocks. The City’s Office of Violence Prevention and the Milwaukee Police Department both provide free gun locks to community members who request them.