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Murphy proposes 8 ‘sweeping’ new gun laws in wake of rising homicides, shootings nationwide

By Blake Nelson

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Gov. Phil Murphy proposed a host of new gun policies Thursday, including only giving permits to residents who pass gun safety classes and raising the purchasing age from 18 to 21.

The proposals follow the surging number of homicides in New Jersey and several mass shootings in other parts of the country.

If enacted, the changes would “perhaps be the most sweeping gun violence prevention package in the history of our nation,” Murphy said to more than 100 people during a press conference in a Newark community center.

“We cannot sit back when we know there is more to do to address the danger of gun violence in our communities,” the governor said.

Other proposals would require guns to be locked up in homes, stamping ammunition to make it easier to trace, mandating an electronic database of all ammunition sold, banning .50 caliber firearms, requiring people moving to New Jersey to register their guns and a bill to make it easier to sue gun manufacturers when their weapons are used in crimes.

He also endorsed spending \$10 million more on violence intervention groups that work to de-escalate conflicts and pumping \$2 million into Rutgers University’s gun violence research.

All of the proposals will require support from the Legislature to become law.

Four Republican state representatives and gun rights proponents said the plan would do little to lower crime.

“Unfortunately, these proposals are more preoccupied with the micro-management of law-abiding firearms owners (who are not the problem) than punishment or deterrence of gun criminals,” Scott Bach, executive director of the Association of New Jersey Rifle & Pistol Clubs, wrote in an email.

Evan Nappen, a prominent Second Amendment attorney, said regulating how residents kept their guns within their homes was likely illegal, and ammunition stamps could easily be rubbed off.

Murphy was joined by local activists and officials as well as state and federal lawmakers. Several people in attendance were part of local street teams that work to head off potential violence, and the crowd enthusiastically embraced the new proposals.

Newark Mayor Ras Baraka said the dozens of people shot and killed in recent months in Brick City amounted to a slow-moving mass shooting. Lt. Gov. Sheila Oliver teared up as she spoke about young men who recently died. Brian O'Hara, who recently took over Newark's public safety department, said the bills made "common sense."

New Jersey already has some of the toughest gun laws in the nation.

While President Joe Biden recently announced six actions he said would reduce gun violence, many are already a reality in the Garden State.

New Jersey's red flag law, which allows officers to seize guns of residents deemed to be a potential threat, took effect late 2019. More than 180 residents had their guns seized during the next five months.

The state bans ghost guns, and officials have aggressively gone after companies accused of selling do-it-yourself kits.

And last year, the Garden State announced funding for nine programs that attempt to help gunshot victims, in an effort to head off future violence.

"After the last administration, I think this is a tremendous start," state Attorney General Gurbir Grewal said during a recent interview about the federal proposals. "It's encouraging that we're on the right path here, we have a playbook that works and that other states can look towards."