

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Monday, Sept. 16, 2024

**Contact:** Kirstin Alvanitakis, [kirstinalv@pa.gov](mailto:kirstinalv@pa.gov)

**Lt. Gov. Austin Davis Leads Conversation on Reducing Firearm  
Suicide Deaths in Pennsylvania**  
*September Is Suicide Prevention Month – and the Shapiro-Davis  
Administration Is Taking a Holistic Approach to Addressing Gun Violence*

**Harrisburg** – Lt. Gov. Austin Davis joined experts from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and CeaseFirePA Education Fund today for a virtual “lunch and learn” session to discuss how to reduce firearm suicide deaths in the Commonwealth.

“We’re taking a holistic approach to addressing the epidemic of gun violence – and that has to include the epidemic of firearm suicides, which represents the majority of gun deaths in Pennsylvania,” said **Lt. Gov. Austin Davis**, who is also chair of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). “As we recognize Suicide Prevention Month, we must take action to prevent gun suicides. That includes investing in mental and behavioral health services, as well as pushing for commonsense gun safety laws, breaking the stigma about suicide and talking openly and honestly about how we can address this crisis.”

The bipartisan 2024-25 state budget recently signed by Gov. Josh Shapiro provides an additional \$20 million for county mental health programs, \$5 million for crisis stabilization walk-in centers and makes available \$100 million for mental health services and resources for K-12 schools.

Last week, the Governor [signed an executive order to re-establish the state’s Office of Gun Violence Prevention](#), within PCCD. The office will collaborate with the Department of Health’s Division of Violence Prevention, the Department of Human Services and other key stakeholders to increase awareness of firearm safety practices like safer storage.

“Too often, we view firearm suicide as inevitable, as if there was nothing we could have done to prevent a loved one or a community member from taking their own life, especially with a gun – but nothing could be further from the truth,” said **Samantha Bruno**, Eastern Pennsylvania Area Director for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. “From breaking down the stigma through open conversation and education, to prevention policies like safe storage, we can equip not only firearm owners but entire communities with the tools and knowledge needed to save lives.”

Across the country, the overall gun death rate declined in 2023; however, [suicide deaths by firearm continued to increase, reaching a record-high last year](#). Gun suicides represented nearly 60 percent of the total gun-related deaths in 2023.

“The scale of this problem is far more shocking than the statistics alone tell,” said **Dr. Jay Breneman**, Stoneleigh Foundation Fellow and Director of Firearm Suicide Prevention for CeaseFirePA Education Fund. “We must recognize that every suicide death represents a profound loss that continues to devastate families and entire communities for generations to come. Such a complex trauma requires an equally comprehensive response, and we appreciate the Lieutenant Governor’s leadership in this life-saving work.”

In Pennsylvania, youth mental health concerns have continued to increase. Data from the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS), last administered by PCCD in 2023, shows that more than 16 percent of Pennsylvania students seriously considered suicide and one in 10 students in middle and high school students in PA had planned suicide in the past year.

If you or a loved one are experiencing a behavioral health crisis, call or text 988 to contact the [Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#), which is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

*Video available at PACast.com*

# # #