

Democratic lawmakers plead for change in state gun laws

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Background check, ‘red flag law’ measures have broad public support, advocates say.

MADISON - With every legislative session since Gov. Tony Evers took office, the governor and Democratic lawmakers have sought legislation that they say could tamp down, at least slightly, the proliferation of firearms in Wisconsin. They’ve been ignored or rebuffed by leaders of the Legislature’s Republican majority each time.

Even the recent mass shootings of Black supermarket patrons killed by a white supremacist in Buffalo, New York, and schoolchildren and teachers massacred at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, weren’t the most recent ones any more, said Sen. Melissa Agard (D-Madison) at a mid-morning news conference in the Capitol on Thursday. Hours before Agard took the podium, there were three more incidents overnight Wednesday in Tulsa, Okla., Los Angeles, and Pittston, Pa.

Agard and Sen. LaTonya Johnson (D-Milwaukee) called the news conference to air their frustration and issue a public challenge to the absent Republicans. “We’re asking for our legislative colleagues to take seriously what we know people all across the state of Wisconsin are asking for: action in addressing gun violence,” Agard said.

The event focused on two pieces of legislation. One was for universal background checks for

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firearms purchases that would end the state's current exemption of private sales. The other was for a "red flag" law that police or family members could use to seek an extreme risk protection order in court to take guns from gun owners who are found to be a danger to themselves or others.

Agard was surrounded by a crowd of other lawmakers as well as volunteers who wore shirts identifying themselves with March For Our Lives, Moms Demand Action and other groups that have campaigned to reduce the proliferation of firearms.

Another advocate who joined them was Darryl Morin. Morin, who is based in the Milwaukee suburb of Franklin, is the national president of the advocacy group Forward Latino.

He is also the founder of the 80% Coalition, made up of Forward Latino, several gun safety advocacy groups and several faith groups, including the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Milwaukee Synod, and the Wisconsin Council of Churches. The coalition's motto is "Pray and Act," said Morin, who wore the slogan on his jacket lapel.

The coalition formed after mass shootings in Gilroy, Calif., and El Paso, Texas, in which many who lost their lives were Hispanic, Morin said. It has focused its legislative priorities on the background check and red-flag law proposals and takes its name from Marquette University Law School polls that found that more than 80% of Wisconsin voters support those two measures.

The coalition's member groups represent almost 1 million Wisconsin residents, Morin said. "These are people of all political stripes, racial and ethnic backgrounds across the socioeconomic spectrum. And many of their members, like myself, lawfully own firearms and are demanding these changes."

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