

Amnesty Slams Trump for Classifying Gun Stores as ‘Essential Businesses’ During Pandemic

"With hospitals at critically low capacity due to the pandemic, we cannot afford more injuries or deaths from gun violence."

By [Julia Conley](#)

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Human rights defenders on Tuesday demanded that the Trump administration reverse its decision to designate gun stores as “essential businesses” during the coronavirus pandemic and warned that increased gun violence during the national public health crisis will only add to the strain on overwhelmed health systems.

Following aggressive lobbying by the firearms industry, the administration over the weekend [added gun stores](#) to its list of essential services which should remain open to the public during the crisis—suggesting firearms rank alongside food, medicine, and medical supplies as crucial products Americans need during the pandemic.

The decision came weeks into the coronavirus pandemic, during which, Amnesty International noted, accidental shootings have continued to kill Americans, including a [three-year-old boy](#) in Kentucky.

“Instead of taking aggressive measures to curb gun violence, the federal government has again prioritized gun ownership over the basic right to live in safety and listed firearms as essential and critical to pandemic infrastructure,” [said Ernest Coverson](#), campaign manager for the End Gun Violence Campaign at Amnesty International USA. “Gun retailers are not essential businesses and should not remain open during this pandemic.”

Gun sales have gone up since the disease began spreading across the country earlier this month, with [AFP reporting](#) an 800% increase in sales at one store in Oklahoma. One store owner told the outlet the sales seemed partially driven by fears of theft, as Americans stock up on large amounts of household goods.

Trump critics and gun safety groups slammed the administration on social media and raised concern that firearms could become even more prevalent in American homes following the “essential business” designation.

The Trump administration has buckled to the NRA and deemed gun dealers and manufacturers as essential as hospital workers, first responders and others who are risking everything to save lives.

Tell Trump's DHS that gun shops are not essential businesses:
<https://t.co/mwBnVNR60B> pic.twitter.com/C94tRZc9v0

— Moms Demand Action (@MomsDemand) [March 31, 2020](#)

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Guns are not essential. <https://t.co/u2YyG1dZrc>

— @csgv (@CSGV) [March 30, 2020](#)

As a spokesperson for Brady, a gun control group, told *ABC News* Monday, the NRA, the National Shooting Sports Foundation, and other pro-gun groups have tried to exploit the crisis for their own ends.

“The gun lobby is not willing to stand for a few days or a few weeks of less profit in order to protect public health, and it’s outrageous and definitely not required by the Second Amendment,” Brady chief counsel **Jonathan Lowy** told ABC. “It’s a public health issue, not a Second Amendment issue.”

Keeping gun stores open as Americans across the country do their part to slow the spread of the coronavirus will put consumers in preventable danger, he added—not only from gun violence, but also from the spread of the virus.

“The fact is that guns, the nature of guns, require that they be sold with a lot of close interaction,” Lowy [said](#). “They can’t be sold from vending machines, can’t be sold with curbside pickup.”

The gun industry’s insistence on maintaining its bottom line during a public health crisis, said Amnesty, is likely to put even more strain on healthcare workers who are facing shortages of ventilators, face masks, gloves, and other medical equipment as the virus spreads.

“With hospitals at critically low capacity due to the pandemic, we cannot afford more injuries or deaths from gun violence,” said Coverson. “The federal government has made a mistake that will only lead to more lives lost because of senseless gun violence.”

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Featured image: The foundation of the United States is embedded in gun violence. (Photo: Joe Loong)

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