

STATE POLITICS

# Parkland families push petitions for 2020 ban on assault weapons in Florida

BY DAVID SMILEY

FEBRUARY 11, 2019 12:27 PM, UPDATED FEBRUARY 13, 2019 09:53 AM



Ban Assault Weapons Now Chairwoman Gail Schwartz, aunt of Parkland shooting victim Alex Schachter, submits petitions to the Broward County Supervisor of Elections office on Monday, Feb. 11, 2019, as part of an initiative to put a ban on the sale of military-grade weapons on the 2020 ballot. With Schwartz at the Broward County Government Center in Fort Lauderdale are, from left; Parkland shooting survivor David Hogg; Debbie Hixon, widow of Parkland shooting victim Chris Hixon; and Mitch Dworet, father of Parkland shooting victim Nick Dworet. **AMY BETH BENNETT** SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL



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Relatives of some of the 17 people killed in the Feb. 14 massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High gathered with activists Monday in Fort Lauderdale to submit the first of what they hope will be more than 1 million petitions signed in a push to force a 2020 ballot question to prohibit the possession of what they called “military-grade” weapons. If it passes, the ban would be cemented as an amendment to the Florida Constitution.

“If these politicians don’t take action on this, the voters can,” said David Hogg, a Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School alum who emerged last year as one of the leading figures in a student-led movement.

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Parkland survivor David Hogg speaks at the Broward County Government Center in Fort Lauderdale on Monday, Feb. 11, 2019, after the submission of petitions to the Broward County Supervisor of Elections office aimed at putting a ban on sales of military-grade weapons on the 2020 ballot.

Amy Beth Bennett *South Florida Sun Sentinel*

The effort — which so far has netted just 88,000 of the required 766,200 signatures — began nearly a year ago amid a surprisingly successful push by activists and Parkland families to move a sweeping gun- and school-safety measure through the Republican-controlled Legislature. The Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act created a “red flag” law to remove guns from the hands of people believed by a judge to be unstable, raised the minimum age to buy a rifle and banned the sale and possession of attachments capable of converting semiautomatic weapons into fully automatic..

But attempts to amend the bill to completely ban “assault weapons” went nowhere.

So in March, the Ban Assault Weapons Now political committee was formed in order to move a petition drive that would outlaw the civilian possession of any semiautomatic rifle or shotgun capable of holding more than 10 rounds at any time “either in fixed or detachable magazine, or any other ammunition-feeding device.” Assault weapons that were legally purchased before the ban kicks in will remain legal as long as they’re registered.

A violation would bring a third-degree felony charge.

“It’s time to ban the type of military-grade assault weapons in the state of Florida that are used by our military overseas on our enemies on the battlefield,” BAWN Chairwoman Gail Schwartz said Monday morning, straining to be heard over rain and the roar of cars splashing past the downtown Broward County government headquarters on Andrews Avenue.

Schwartz, the aunt of slain Parkland teen Alex Schachter, was flanked by a group of activists that included Hogg, the father of slain 17-year-old Nick Dworet, and the widow of school athletic director Chris Hixon. They gathered under the umbrella of Do Something Florida!, a bipartisan organization created to push the assault weapons ban.





Schachter's 14 year old son Alex was killed during the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas on February 14, 2018.

By David Santiago / dsantiago@miamiherald.com

The move is essentially an end-around the Florida Legislature, which Democrats have found to be the best course of action on big-ticket progressive issues in conservative Florida. It's how environmentalists forced the state to set aside hundreds of millions for land acquisition in 2014, and how personal injury attorney John Morgan forced a comprehensive medical marijuana market into existence two years later.

So far, Schwartz's political committee has reported raising \$439,000 in just under a year. They'll need to raise millions more to be successful.

"This is a huge endeavor and it's very costly to collect this many signatures all throughout Florida," she said.

A Florida Atlantic University poll conducted shortly after the shooting last year found that 69 percent of Floridians supported a ban (which would require 60 percent support at the ballot box). And the petition drive is bipartisan, backed by Americans for Gun Safety, a group formed by Parkland developer and Republican mega-donor Al Hoffman. Anne Marie Milano, a representative for Hoffman, said Monday that the group "isn't trying to take anyone's guns or

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**David Smiley** @NewsbySmiley · Feb 11, 2019

Parkland families and activists delivered the first of a planned 1.1 million signed petitions in Fort Lauderdale this morning in an effort to put an "assault weapons" ban on the 2020 ballot in Florida

**David Smiley** @NewsbySmiley

Here's the definition of assault weapon in the petition, proposed by Ban Assault Weapons Now [pic.twitter.com/6LhxZ9oRGE](https://pic.twitter.com/6LhxZ9oRGE)

6 10:43 AM - Feb 11, 2019

[bawnf.org](https://bawnf.org)

Please change my legal residence address on my voter registration record to the above residence address (check box, if applicable).

1 of 3 Registration Number: QR Date of Birth:

I, \_\_\_\_\_, a resident of Florida and hereby petition the Secretary of State to place the following proposed amendment to the Florida Constitution on the ballot in the general election:

**BALLOT TITLE:** Prohibits possession of defined assault weapons

**BALLOT SUMMARY:** Prohibits possession of assault weapons, defined as semiautomatic rifles and shotguns capable of holding more than 10 rounds of ammunition at once, either in fixed or detachable magazine, or any other ammunition-feeding device. Possession of handguns is not prohibited. Exempts military and law enforcement personnel in their official duties. Exempts and requires registration of assault weapons lawfully possessed prior to this provision's effective date. Creates criminal penalties for violations of this amendment.

**ARTICLE AND SECTION BEING CREATED OR AMENDED:** Article I, Section 8

**Full text of proposed constitutional amendment:**

**ARTICLE I, SECTION 8. Right to Bear Arms.—**

(a) The right of the people to keep and bear arms in defense of themselves and of the lawful authority of the state shall not be infringed, except that the manner of bearing arms may be regulated by law.

(b) There shall be a mandatory period of three days, excluding weekends and legal holidays, between the purchase and


[See David Smiley's other Tweets](#)

But any campaign would be sure to face stiff opposition. Florida's conservative Legislature has been resistant to gun control measures. New Gov. Ron DeSantis said on the campaign trail that he would have vetoed last year's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act. And the National Rifle Association has enormous clout in Tallahassee due to an incredibly large and politically active membership.



“This petition seeks to ban practically every rifle and shotgun in America today with the exception [of] single-shot bolt action rifles or single-shot shotguns by calling them assault weapons,” said NRA lobbyist Marion Hammer. “It is a blatant attempt to fool Floridians by sucking them into a deception that would effectively ban most hunting, target shooting and significant home defense as well.”

And unlike their unity around Senate Bill 7026, the law that passed during last year’s legislative session, leading to a series of school safety laws as well as weapons restrictions, Parkland families aren’t united behind the petition drive.


**Andrew Pollack**   
 @AndrewPollackFL



After Parkland, Florida passed a nonpartisan school safety bill.

Other states should enact bills similar to SB7026 and skip the obstructing gun debate. [@SenRickScott](#) [@richardcorcoran](#) [@jaredmoskowitz](#) [@RepJoseOliva](#) [#fixit sun-sentinel.com/news/nationwor...](#)

♡ 498 9:54 AM - Feb 5, 2019 ⓘ



**Parkland parents to attend State of the Union speech**

Fred Guttenberg, Andrew Pollack and Manuel Oliver will attend as guests of congressional members, as will Cameron Kasky, a student [sun-sentinel.com](#)

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“Other states should enact bills similar to SB7026 and skip the obstructing gun debate,” Andrew Pollack, whose daughter Meadow was killed in the shooting, tweeted last week.

But to get to the point of even campaigning, Do Something Florida! first needs to submit the required petitions to get a question on the ballot. The group plans to snare 1.1 million petition signatures, hoping the extra petitions will help provide a cushion for any signatures deemed invalid by elections supervisors.

They have a little under one year to gather the additional million signatures needed and submit them in time to be verified by a Feb. 1, 2020, deadline to get questions on the November 2020 ballot.

Hogg, the student activist, said the question can pass if it makes it onto the ballot.


“If guns made us safer,” he said, “Americans wouldn’t be having this issue right now.”


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David Smiley is a Florida native (yes, they exist) and veteran of South Florida journalism. He’s covered schools, cops and crime, and various city halls, earning awards for stories about municipal pensions and Miami Beach’s police department. He became the Miami Herald’s political reporter in 2018 and covered the midterm elections and recount.



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