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Advocates, politicians again call for Texas to pursue red flag laws after shooting at Lakewood Church

By **John Wayne Ferguson**, Staff writer

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State Rep. Ann Johnson, a Democrat from Houston, speaks about red flag laws during a press conference in Houston on Tuesday, Feb. 20, 2023

John Wayne Ferguson/Houston Chronicle

Houston Police Chief Troy Finner stood in front of thousands of people Sunday inside Lakewood Church and said church goers had narrowly avoided being the victims of a mass shooting just a week before.

Gun control advocates and a small group of local politicians gathered in a smaller church across town Tuesday, and said it was enough of a close call to spur change.

Moms Demand Actions, the gun control advocacy group, called for Texas leaders to consider so-called red flag laws at a news conference. Gun control advocates have said that a red flag law, also known as an extreme risk protection order, could allow courts to seize guns from or stop purchases by people deemed a public safety threat. Twenty-one states have some form of red flag laws, but efforts to get similar laws passed in Texas have failed.

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“Here we are again, after another senseless incident, that happened at Lakewood, that we can’t be numb to or that we can’t desensitize ourselves to as another headline,” state Rep. Ron Reynolds, a Democrat from Missouri City, said before name checking state leaders, including Texas Gov. Greg Abbot.

“Enough is enough,” Reynolds said. “When are we going to start prioritizing people over politics?”

The Feb. 11 shooting at pastor Joel Osteen’s megachurch left the alleged gunman, Genesse Moreno, dead, her 7-year-old son critically wounded and another man

with a leg wound.

Local leaders, including [Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez](#) and [County Judge Lina Hidalgo](#), have also called for the state to pass increased gun control laws.

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Mayor John Whitmire and Houston Police Chief Troy Finner join Lakewood Church pastors during a special service on Sunday, Feb. 18, 2024, in Houston, a week after a deadly shooting took place just before the Spanish speaking service. (Raquel Nataliccio/Houston Chronicle)

Raquel Nataliccio/Staff photographer

The Rev. Colin Bossen, the senior minister at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston, where the news conference took place, said his church has in recent years taken to hiring armed security to watch over services, out of fear the church

would be the target of a mass shooting.

“Having common sense gun legislation, including red flag laws, would make it so that we wouldn’t need to take such measures,” Bossen said. “It’s just not the sort of environment we want to create on Sunday morning. I don’t want somebody to see an armed police officer. I don’t want to have to lock our doors all the time.”

Police have said that Moreno legally bought the AR-style rifle she fired inside the church before she was shot by two off-duty police officers. It’s unclear where she bought the gun. Moreno had a history of run-ins with police, and family members have said she was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Even so, it’s possible Moreno was able to buy the gun because she didn’t have any felony arrests or because her mental health diagnosis wasn’t recorded in a way that would show up on a federal background check.

State Rep. Ann Johnson, a Democrat from Houston, said she introduced a red flag law to lawmakers last year, but the bill received little interest in the Republican-controlled Legislature.

“I’m tired of fearing the inaction of not getting this type of bill passed,” Johnson said, vowing to reintroduce the bill during the next session in 2025.

“What a fraud to perpetrate on all of us all believe that constitutionally a person in a dangerous mental health crisis is more entitled to have a gun than we are entitled to pass legislation to keep everyday Texans safe,” Johnson said. Johnson is running unopposed in this year’s primary election but will have a Republican challenger in the November general election.

Despite being proposed in the Texas Legislature for years, red flag laws have yet

to gain much momentum, even as polling indicated that Texans supported the idea to some degree.

A 2022 poll found that 75% of voters supported laws that “give family members or law enforcement a way to ask a judge to issue an order temporarily removing guns from someone who poses a violent threat to themselves or others.”

A poll released Tuesday by the Texas Politics Project at the University of Austin found that Texans generally support the idea that an increase in available guns make people less safe. The poll found that 45% of people say the U.S. would be less safe if more people carried guns. There were partisan differences among people who answered the poll. Fifty-one percent of Republicans who responded said more guns would make the U.S. safer, while 74% of Democrats said the opposite.

The poll also found broad support for raising the legal age for purchasing a firearm from 18 to 21. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has claimed it's unconstitutional for Texas to raise the legal age for gun purchases, a view that's disputed among some legal experts.

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By **John Wayne Ferguson**



John Wayne Ferguson is a general assignment and breaking news reporter for the Houston Chronicle. A graduate of the University of New Hampshire, John joined the Chronicle in 2022. He was previously a reporter at The Galveston County Daily News. Follow him on Twitter at @johnwferguson.

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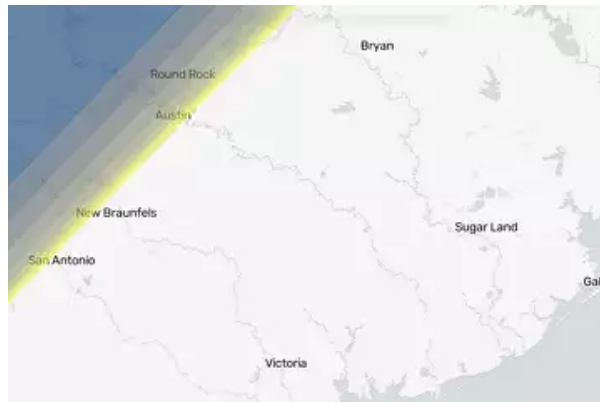
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