

Covenant School Shooting - Nashville, Tennessee

April 3, 2023

The Incident

- On Monday morning, shortly after 10 am local time, a shooter opened fire at Covenant School in the Green Hills neighborhood of Nashville, Tennessee, killing three children and three adults. ([CNN](#))
- According to the [Gun Violence Archive](#), this marks the 129th incident where at least four people were shot, excluding the shooter, since the beginning of the year.
- The shooter breached the locked door of the building by shooting through it at 10:10 am local time and entered the building at 10:11 am local time. ([CNN](#))
- Metro Nashville PD received the first 911 call on the shooting at 10:13 am local time. The shooter was engaged by Metro Nashville PD and killed at 10:27 am local time. ([CNN](#))
- Five officers responded; two engaged the shooter on the second floor. ([CNN](#))
- The shooter fired multiple shots on the first and second floors of the school before police fatally shot the shooter on the second floor. ([Washington Post](#))
- The Covenant School is a private pre-K through sixth grade school located on the campus of Covenant Presbyterian Church. ([The Covenant School](#))
- [Nashville Fire](#) and [Nashville PD](#) initially reported an “active aggressor” at the Covenant School in the Green Hills neighborhood of Nashville, Tennessee.
- ATF Nashville responded to the scene. ([Link](#))
- FBI Memphis responded. ([Link](#))
- Nashville Police Chief John Drake indicated that the shooter may have had other targets in addition to the school, including family members and a Nashville mall. ([CBS News](#))

The Suspect

The prospect of infamy often serves as a motivating factor for mass shooters. While GIFFORDS will list the shooter name (if available) once for identification purposes, we commit to and encourage limited use of the name and likeness in further reporting and statements.

- The shooter was identified as Audrey Hale, 28, a Nashville resident, three law enforcement officials briefed on the matter told NBC News. ([NBC](#)) According to Nashville Police Chief John Drake, the shooter identified as transgender. ([NBC](#))
- Police said that the shooter appears to be a former student of the school. ([NBC](#))
- The police confirmed the shooting was a targeted attack on the school, though there is no evidence that any specific individuals were targeted. Police also found detailed maps of the school and other potential targets at the shooter’s home. ([NYT](#))
- Police believe the shooter “may have had other targets, including a local mall.” ([CBS](#))
- Prior to the shooting, at 9:57 am local time, the shooter sent a message to a former basketball teammate expressing plans to die by suicide and that this event would be covered on the news. ([CNN](#))

- According to the Metro Nashville PD, the shooter's parents were under the impression that their child did not own any firearms after recently selling a weapon. The parents also indicated that they felt that their child "should not own weapons." ([NYT](#))

The Weapons

- Metro Nashville PD stated at the 4:00p press conference that the shooter was armed with an "assault type rifle, an AR pistol, and a handgun." The shooter was also said to have "multiple rounds of ammunition, prepared for confrontation with law enforcement." ([CNN](#))
- Police released [photos](#) of the weapons, though did not elaborate in press conference
 - "One of the weapons used appears to be a KelTec SUB2000 Carbine Rifle, a foldable semi-automatic weapon." ([Newsweek](#))
 - "Another appears to be a Grunt .300 Blackout Rifle, a semi-automatic gun manufactured by Lead Star Arms." ([Newsweek](#))
 - "[T]he 9 mm handgun used appears to be a Smith & Wesson M&P9 Shield EZ." ([Newsweek](#))
- A search warrant executed at Hale's home also resulted in the seizure of a sawed-off shotgun, a second shotgun and other evidence, according to police. ([CNN](#))
- The shooter recently purchased seven firearms from five local gun stores and stashed them around the house. Three of these guns were used in the Monday shooting. ([NYT](#)) Police believe one of these seven weapons had been sold and one remains unaccounted for. ([CNN](#))

The Victims

- Six victims were killed, including three children and three adults. ([Washington Post](#))
- The three child victims were transferred to Monroe Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt University, where a spokesperson confirmed that all three were pronounced dead after arrival. ([WKRN](#), [Washington Post](#))
- The six victims were identified by police as: Evelyn Dieckhaus, Hallie Scruggs, and William Kinney, all age 9, Cynthia Peak, age 61, Katherine Koonce, age 60, and Mike Hill, age 61. ([Metro Nashville Police Department](#))
- Hallie Scruggs was the daughter of the current Lead Pastor at Covenant Presbyterian Church. ([CNN](#))
- Katherine Koonce was the Head of School. ([ABC News](#))
- Cynthia Peak was a substitute teacher working at the school on the day of the attack. ([ABC News](#))
- Mike Hill was a custodian at the Covenant School. ([ABC News](#))

Tennessee Gun Laws

- In 2021, Tennessee had the 10th highest gun death rate in the country. The gun death rate in Tennessee was 56% higher than the national average gun death rate.
- On average, more than 1,350 people die from gun violence each year in Tennessee.

- In [GIFFORDS Law Center's Annual Gun Law Scorecard](#), released in 2023, Tennessee received a **F** for its gun safety laws, ranking **38 out of the 50 states**.
- Tennessee has only a small handful of gun safety laws on the books, including certain [domestic violence protections](#) and some weak [child access prevention](#) and [anti-trafficking laws](#).
- However, Tennessee does not require [background checks](#) for gun sales by unlicensed sellers, has not enacted an [extreme risk protection order law](#), places no restrictions on the sale of [military-style assault rifles](#) and [large-capacity magazines](#), does not require a [waiting period](#), and generally [preempts](#) local cities and counties from enacting their own gun safety ordinance.
- Since July 2021, Tennessee law also generally allows people to carry loaded handguns in public spaces without a permit (without any background check or training whatsoever). People may also carry unloaded long guns, provided they do not have ammunition for the weapon in their "immediate vicinity."
- Currently, the legislature is considering two bills which would further weaken gun laws in Tennessee, by expanding open carry for assault weapons and long guns and allowing 18-year-olds to openly carry these weapons.

Federal Legislation

- On January 26, 2023, Senator Chris Van Hollen and Congressman Jamie Raskin introduced S. 117/H.R. 569, the Handgun Permit to Purchase Act, which would incentivize state and local governments to pass permit-to-purchase laws that require individuals to obtain a license before purchasing a handgun.
- On January 30, 2023, Representatives Diana DeGette, Dina Titus, and Brad Schneider introduced H.R. 625, Keep Americans Safe Act, which would ban large-capacity magazines holding more than 15 rounds of ammunition.
- On January 31, 2023, Senator Richard Blumenthal and Congresswoman Rose DeLauro introduced S. 173/H.R. 660, Ethan's Law, which would require safe storage of firearms and help states implement safe storage laws.
- On February 1, 2023, Congressmen Brian Fitzpatrick and Mike Thompson introduced H.R. 715, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act. Senator Chris Murphy introduced the Senate version of this legislation, the Background Check Expansion Act, on February 16, 2023. This legislation would require a background check for every gun sale or transfer, with limited exceptions.
 - In the 117th Congress, this legislation was successfully passed by the House of Representatives on March 11, 2021, but did not advance in the Senate.
- On February 1, 2023, Congressman Cicilline introduced H.R. 698, the Assault Weapons Ban, which would prevent the future manufacture and importation of assault weapons.
 - This bill passed the House on July 29, 2022, but did not receive a vote in the Senate during the 117th Congress.
 - On January 23, 2023, Senator Feinstein introduced a Senate version as S. 25, the Assault Weapons Ban.

- On February 2, 2023, Senator Dianne Feinstein and Congressman Salud Carbajal introduced S. 247/H.R. 768, the Extreme Risk Protection Order Expansion Act, which would establish a federal grant program to support state, tribal, and local efforts to establish and implement extreme risk laws to temporarily remove firearms from individuals a court finds at risk of endangering the public or themselves.
- On June 25, 2022, President Biden signed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA), the first significant gun safety legislation to become law in nearly 30 years. The BSCA authorizes federal funding for the implementation and establishment of state extreme risk protection order programs, addresses the dating/intimate partner loophole, funds community violence intervention and prevention programs, requires enhanced background checks for people under 21 to buy long guns, addresses gun trafficking and straw purchasing, and clarifies who is considered a licensed gun dealer, among other things.
- President Biden has taken a number of steps to reduce gun violence through executive actions, including issuing a final rule to limit untraceable homemade guns, known as “ghost guns,” issuing a final rule to regulate short barreled rifles and shotguns equipped with stabilizing braces, convening the White House Community Violence Intervention Collaborative, publishing a model extreme risk protection order legislation for states and the first two volumes of a multi-volume comprehensive report on firearms commerce and trafficking, and nominating Steven Dettelbach to serve as the director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).
 - On July 12, 2022, the Senate confirmed Steven Dettelbach as ATF director, the first ATF director confirmed by the Senate since 2006. ATF had been without a confirmed director since 2015.
- On June 8, 2022, the House of Representatives passed the Protecting Our Kids Act ([H.R. 7910](#)), which was led by Representatives Jerry Nadler, Sheila Jackson Lee, and Mike Thompson. This legislation included provisions to raise the federal minimum age to buy assault-style rifles and shotguns from 18 to 21 years old, create a federal firearms trafficking statute and eliminate financial incentives for gun traffickers, prohibit the manufacture and sale of “ghost guns,” which are unserialized and untraceable firearms, require safe storage of firearms in limited circumstances and the establishment of safe storage best practices, regulate bump stocks like machine guns under the National Firearms Act, and ban the manufacture and sale of large capacity magazines.
 - Each individual title within the bill received bipartisan support on the House floor, as did the legislation as a whole.
 - This legislation did not receive a vote in the Senate during the 117th Congress.

Background on School Shootings

- Gun violence is the leading cause of death for American children. On average, more than 2,000 children under age 18 are killed by guns each year.
- This shooting marks at least the [90th incident](#) where a gun has been brandished or fired at a K–12 school or a bullet has hit school property this year. It is the [second](#) active shooter incident in a K–12 school this year.

- As of this shooting, [more than 348,000 children](#) have been present at a school during a school shooting.
- School shootings take a devastating toll on the mental health and wellbeing of survivors and the broader community.
 - Children who experience school shootings are more likely to have severe symptoms of trauma, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms.
 - [Multiple studies have documented](#) that exposure to violence in general is associated with lower grades, more absences, lower test scores, and lower rates of high school graduation.
 - These declines can have implications for years to come. [A recent analysis](#) found that by the ages of 24 to 26, those who attended a school where a shooting occurred earned nearly 14% less than peers who attended the school before the shooting or who attended schools that did not experience shootings. The researchers estimate that this reduction in earnings amounts to a loss in lifetime income of \$115,550 per shooting-exposed student.
 - [One study](#) found a 21% increase in youth antidepressant use in a school shooting-exposed community in the two years following the shooting.