

Creating a Safer America

An Interview with Kris Brown, President, Brady

EDITORS' NOTE *As President of Brady, Kris Brown combines a lifelong background in policy, law and grassroots activism with considerable strategic management expertise to help forge the direction of the organization's programs and ensure the successful impact of its national and field assets. A veteran of gun violence prevention work, Brown started her career on Capitol Hill working for Representative Jim Moran, advocating for the bill that would eventually become the groundbreaking Brady Bill requiring background checks on federally licensed gun sales. She has also served as the Chief Legal Officer to a publicly traded company based in Switzerland and as a lawyer practicing at the law firm Weil, Gotshal & Manges. Brown earned a BA in English language and literature/letters from Virginia Tech and a JD from George Mason University School of Law.*



Kris Brown

INSTITUTION BRIEF *Brady (bradyunited.org) has one powerful mission – to unite all Americans against gun violence. It works across Congress, the courts, and its communities with over 90 grassroots chapters, bringing together young and old, red and blue, and every shade of color to find common ground in common sense. In the spirit of its namesakes Jim and Sarah Brady, it has fought for over 45 years to take action, not sides, and will not stop until this epidemic ends.*

Will you highlight the history of Brady and how the organization has evolved?

Brady is one of the oldest, national gun violence prevention organizations in the United States and has been active for 40 years. Brady started out as a small nonprofit in Washington, DC, focused on sensible regulation of handguns. However, after Jim Brady was shot in the 1981 assassination attempt against Ronald Reagan, he and his wife, Sarah, joined the organization and achieved what was then thought impossible, the passage of the federal Brady law, requiring background checks before any firearm is sold in the U.S. Today, our organization bears their name in honor of their legacy of taking action, not sides, and achieving life-saving change.

How do you define Brady's purpose and mission?

Brady works across Congress, courts and communities to end the epidemic of gun violence in America. We view gun violence as a public health epidemic and a preventable, uniquely American tragedy. We can fix it by improving policy, holding gun dealers and manufacturers who violate the law accountable, and reinforcing what it means to be a responsible gun owner in American life.

Will you provide an overview of Brady's programs?

Brady has state and federal policy teams, expert litigators and a national advertising campaign that underpin our efforts to reframe the issue of gun violence as one that is not political, but personal, and solvable. Our legal team has litigated in court on behalf of victims of gun violence for over 30 years. We have secured more than \$60 million in judgments against bad actors who knowingly violated the law and sold guns used to kill or severely injure children, daughters, brothers, sisters, dads, uncles and far too many Americans across the country. We have won landmark precedents holding that gun

companies can be held legally responsible for the damage caused by their irresponsible business practices and we have forced gun dealers and manufacturers to reform their practices to prevent sales of guns to dangerous people.

We have also launched the nation's first public interest campaign focused on revitalizing what it means to be a responsible gun owner by giving a name to the preventable gun deaths and injuries that occur because of far too easy access to a loaded and unsecured weapon in the home – Family Fire. Family Fire includes unintentional death and injury from unsecured weapons in the home, which kills or injures eight children and teens nationwide every day. It also includes the leading cause of gun death: suicide by gun. If every American takes some common sense steps to keep themselves and their families safe from Family Fire, and safely stores their guns, we work hard to expand sensible laws and enforce the laws we have, we can achieve positive change. With over 1 billion views, the End Family Fire campaign is revitalizing the role of safe storage as an essential pathway to reduce gun violence in America which, if fully practiced, has the potential to cut gun death and injury in half in the U.S., saving more than 20,000 lives per year.

Brady also has a team that focuses exclusively on holding gun dealers accountable for failing to incorporate appropriate safeguards in the sale of guns in this country, a major problem that is contributing to the vast majority of guns used in crime across the country. Our crime guns program includes data-driven solutions that allow Americans to understand which gun dealers have known violations of the law, and encourages transparency about those infractions so that public action can be taken to shut down or reform dealers with routine and flagrant violations. For more information on this work, please go to bradyunited.org and gunstoretransparency.org.

What do you feel are the keys to driving sustainable change in the fight against gun violence?

We must treat gun violence as the epidemic that it is. We lose more than 40,000 Americans a year to gun violence, and approximately 80,000 more are injured per year and must live with the lifelong consequences of those injuries. Because we have failed to create a system that prevents gun violence, our children are subjected to and traumatized by active shooter and lock down drills in schools, creating long-term fear and

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impacts. Gun violence has a grossly disproportionate impact on Black Americans in this country: the lifespan of a Black man is reduced by four years compared to his white counterparts because of gun violence, while gun violence is the leading cause of death of Black youth.

We need to treat gun violence in the same way we have begun to think of the opioid crisis and focus on the sources of the problem. This means and includes the relatively small portion of gun dealers that contribute to the vast majority of homicide gun deaths, as well as hold negligent dealers and manufacturers accountable for their role in this crisis.

We must also address drivers in gun injury and death as they exist now and work with individual gun owners to provide solutions and steps that they can take in their own homes to prevent gun violence, most importantly, safe storage. Brady’s End Family Fire campaign does just that, and it can be transformative if every American fully internalizes the need, the imperative, to safely store any firearms in their home to avoid horrific and preventable tragedy.

We must strengthen laws that we know work. The Brady law was passed more than a quarter century ago before the Internet was a thing and gun shows were not big business. The landscape has changed, and today individuals who are selling many guns with no background checks escape scrutiny because they are not considered “Federally Licensed Firearms Dealers” as currently defined by law. Laws need to be adapted to changing times. Today, that means passing universal background checks, something that over 90 percent of Americans support.

Finally, we must eliminate the shield from civil immunity given to the gun industry by Congress, the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act. More than a decade ago, the National Rifle Association lobbied for and won an unprecedented and wholly un-American protection for itself: immunity from civil liability for the harm caused by its products. No other industry in America has this protection. This law has left the gun industry largely unregulated and allowed the industry to operate without needing to adapt and improve, such as implementing safer technologies that provide better protection for users, all while leaving victims of horrific violence with few remedies in court. Brady has been poking holes in this law successfully

for over a decade, but the law itself must be repealed to put balance back in our society and tip the scales toward safety and away from gun industry profits at all costs.

Do you feel that there is an effective dialog taking place among policymakers on the need to address gun violence?

Yes, in many areas there are great dialogues taking place around this issue. We have seen the Biden Administration unveil a record number of Executive Actions to end gun violence that are meaningful, and that has shifted the role of enforcement agencies to focusing more on suppliers of guns and preventing the problem of gun violence before it starts. But to make a difference, more lawmakers must focus on gun violence for what it is: a public health epidemic that requires strong, effective policy like the Brady law, better enforcement of that policy, and a laser focus on the demands of responsible gun ownership.

Far too many lawmakers are beholden to the NRA – they are doing their bidding and potentially delivering that reality to America. They need to step back and understand that our very lives are at stake and that the majority of Americans – their constituents – do not want to live in a country where anyone can carry a gun anywhere for any reason. This is not about whether you are Republican or Democrat, from a Red or Blue State, a man or a woman – it is about living in a world where we can go about our daily lives without an omnipresent fear of being shot.

How critical are metrics to track the impact of Brady’s work?

Metrics are absolutely critical. Brady is a data driven organization that recognizes that to end gun violence in America means being focused on facts. And, those facts are clear. We lose more than 40,000 Americans to gun violence and over 80,000 are injured each year. But gun violence is a multifaceted issue: what drives homicides is different than suicide by gun and that is again different from unintentional injury of kids in the home, and domestic violence. Each of these types of violence is linked by a gun, but how you solve these different problems will take different combinations of policy, enforcement of law, and education. Brady focuses on the data, tracks rates of gun violence across all states and the nation and advances programs with the greatest potential to tackle gun violence in a way that drastically

reduces the rate of gun death and injury in this country. We view ourselves as the legacy leader of the gun violence prevention movement in this country and take that role very seriously. We invest in differentiated solutions that tackle gun violence at its source and shift the burden of solving this problem from the victims and their families to the source.

When you are addressing an issue such as gun violence prevention that is a long-term challenge, how do you measure success for Brady’s efforts?

We focus on all of the drivers of gun violence in America and measure our programmatic reach, our legislative accomplishments, and our legal case wins. We know, for example, that since the Brady law was enacted it has stopped more than three million sales of guns to individuals who are prohibited purchasers. We know that this law has contributed to the reduction of what otherwise would be violent acts and helped to save countless Americans. In all that we do, we focus on similar metrics and measures to determine our impact on behavior, on societal norms, and ultimately on lives saved from preventable gun violence.

Did you always know that you were attracted to this type of work and that this is how you wanted to focus your career?

I grew up in a household with a mother who volunteered on political campaigns and a father who spent his career fighting for fair housing and non-discriminatory housing policies as a senior federal employee. I have always been inspired by the need to make the world more fair, more just, and one that lives up to an ideal that I think is essential: that we are all equal and should have the opportunity to live in an environment that allows us to reach our potential. Gun violence robs far too many Americans of the right to reach their potential. It wreaks havoc on our social fabric, furthering gross and disturbing inequities and creating a moral failure as a nation that must be addressed if we are to consider ourselves a just, fair, decent society. Given my feelings on this issue, my family background, and the world I want to leave my daughters, I can think of no more worthy focus of my time than leading this incredible organization with a legacy of achievement that Jim and Sarah, thousands of volunteers, and victims and survivors of gun violence, left for us all. It is now our job to advance that work and create the safer America we all deserve. ●