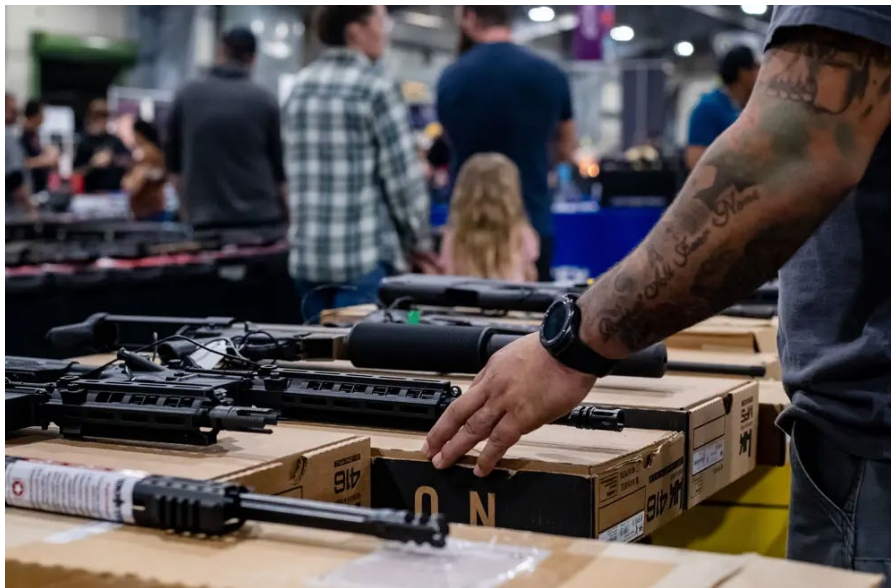


[Raise-the-age gun misses key deadline in Texas House | The Texas Tribune](#)

# Raise-the-age gun bill misses crucial deadline, as Uvalde parents protest outside the Texas House

Days after another mass shooting in Texas, the measure to raise the minimum age from 18 to 21 to purchase semi-automatic rifles appears to have failed.

BY **ALEJANDRO SERRANO** MAY 9, 2023UPDATED: 15 HOURS AGO



A vendor table at the SAXET Gun Show at the Richard M. Borchard Regional Fairgrounds in Robstown on Feb. 26, 2023. Credit: Blaine Young for The Texas Tribune

The unexpected elation felt this week by gun control advocates and families of Uvalde shooting victims dissolved to despair Tuesday, when a bill that would raise the age to legally purchase semi-automatic rifles lost its newfound momentum and was left off the Texas House's agenda ahead of a key deadline.

Barring an unexpected development, the delay likely ends the bill's chances of becoming law.

The proposal has long faced stiff odds in a state that has regularly loosened gun restrictions in recent years. But on Monday, in the aftermath of the [deadly shooting in](#)

an [Allen shopping mall](#), a House committee [unexpectedly advanced the legislation](#) in an 8-5 vote that included two Republicans supporting it.

That left little time for the bill to be added to the House's calendar, however. The final day the House can pass bills is Thursday, and the chamber's agenda must be approved 36 hours ahead of when they convene. That creates a de facto deadline of around 10 p.m. Tuesday for the measure to be placed on the calendar.

When that hour arrived Tuesday night, House Bill 2744 remained off the list.

The measure's supporters, particularly parents of children who died at Robb Elementary in Uvalde who have been advocating for it all session, pushed until the end. Minutes before 10 p.m., a small group stood outside the House chamber holding signs and chanting and calling for the bill to be heard on the House floor. Even then, they could be heard faintly from the back of the chamber.

"2-7-4-4," they yelled. "Put this bill on the floor."

There were less than a dozen of them, but they could be heard inside the House chamber — their chants carrying loudly enough that Capitol staffers closed the doors to the second-floor viewing gallery.

Perhaps the loudest was Brett Cross, whose 10-year-old son Uziyah Garcia was shot to death by an AR-15 in one of Robb's classrooms. When the clock passed 10 p.m., a few Democrats left the chamber and hugged him. Soon after, witnesses in the Capitol said, a Department of Public Safety trooper approached with a decibel monitor, informed him he was being too loud and escorted him out of the building. Cross continued chanting the bill's number as he left.

"This is just another f---ing attempt to slow and stop us," [Cross said on Twitter](#). "2744 may have died tonight, but we will never stop!"

"Texas f---ed with the wrong parents!"

Another parent, Kimberly Mata-Rubio, who lost her 10-year-old daughter Alexandria "Lexi" Aniyah Rubio in the shooting, vowed to travel to the districts of House Speaker [Dade Phelan](#), Calendars Committee Chair [Dustin Burrows](#) and Select Committee on Community Safety Chair [Ryan Guillen](#) and "share Lexi's story, and the disrespect shown to Uvalde families."

"This isn't over," she said. "We will regroup, re-strategize and come back stronger."

[HB 2744](#), filed by Democratic Rep. [Tracy King](#) of Batesville, would prohibit selling, renting, leasing or giving a semi-automatic rifle with a caliber greater than .22 that is capable of accepting a detachable magazine to a person younger than 21 years old — an increase from 18 years old. The proposal includes several exemptions that King said he had added after hearing concerns from constituents.

The opposition to the bill hasn't been vocal in the Legislature, but Republican leadership is fiercely protective of gun rights and reluctant to advance anything that challenges them. Gun advocates say the measure would do little to deter crime and only harm law-abiding gun owners. They also argue that gun ownership is an entrenched American right that shouldn't be infringed upon by the government.

Since getting a [hearing last month](#) — which in and of itself marked a milestone in a gun-friendly legislature — HB 2744 had been left in committee and was poised to be left there.

That is, until Monday, when dozens of supporters, including many relatives of people killed with guns, filled the Capitol to urge lawmakers to advance it. The committee was met with sobs and applause after the last-minute vote.

The gunman at Robb Elementary in Uvalde used an [AR-15-style rifle](#), which he purchased within days of turning 18, after unsuccessfully trying to persuade relatives to illegally buy him a gun. He killed 19 children and two teachers at [Robb Elementary School](#). Relatives of victims have been coming to the Capitol all year to urge lawmakers to raise the age, holding emotional press conferences and confronting lawmakers and state officials.

Their urgency only increased over the weekend, after a gunman killed eight people in Allen.

On Monday, at least two Republicans appeared swayed.

“I am not naive enough to think that laws alone will prevent the type of senseless violence that occurs all too frequently in our state,” [said](#) Rep. [Justin Holland](#), a Rockwall Republican who voted to advance the bill out of committee, in a statement Monday. “But after listening to many hours of testimony over this session, I became convinced that this small change to the law might serve as a significant roadblock to a young person (not old enough to buy tobacco or alcohol) acquiring a specific type of semi-automatic rifle intent upon using it in a destructive and illegal manner.”

As it became clear Tuesday afternoon that the bill was again in danger, proponents voiced their frustration. Some left signs urging its passage outside the Calendars Committee's meeting room. Others protested outside the office of Rep. [Ryan Guillen](#), R-Rio Grande City, the chair of the committee that advanced the bill Monday.

Guillen could not be immediately reached for comment about whether the committee report had been sent to the calendars committee or whether it would be before the deadline.

"I'm sickened that HB 2744 will not be brought to a full House vote," said Rep. [Jarvis Johnson](#), a Houston Democrat who voted to advance the bill Monday as a member of the select House committee. "For once, the legislature seemed to listen to its constituents & do the right thing after getting this bill out of committee."

Lawmakers could use other approaches to revive the proposal. But advocates are realistic that the measure will most likely ultimately fail. Even if it were to pass the House — a tall request — it would still need to advance through a Senate that's perhaps even more skeptical of the idea.

"How many more children have to die before we act?" said one supporter, Bishop John Ogletree, a Houston pastor, in a statement.

*Alexa Ura contributed reporting.*