A month after the Newtown, Conn., school shooting, New York became the first state this year to pass major gun reform. The New York laws expand the definition of “assault weapons,” require gun license renewals and ban owning ammunition magazines with more than seven rounds. The new laws also expand background checks and require mental health professionals to report patients who might be dangerous.

Plenty of lawmakers believe there is no need for action, while others believe gun laws should be loosened to allow more guns into the hands of law-abiding citizens. Still others say it is time to pass “reasonable” restrictions.

Improving the quantity and quality of background checks is high on many legislators’ agendas. Federal law requires licensed firearms dealers to conduct such checks using the FBI’s National Instant Criminal Background Check System. The system handled more than 100 million checks in the last decade, denying permits to more than 700,000 potential gun owners for a variety of reasons.

But the system is not without flaws—many states do not report citizens who are ineligible to buy guns because of privacy laws and other factors. In addition, federal law does not require background checks for private transactions, including those made at gun shows. Some states already require such checks, and others most likely will be debating the issue as the country continues to discuss what should be done to curb gun violence. —Jonathan Griffin

**Background Checks at Gun Shows**

- Required for all sales regardless of type of gun or venue
- Required for all handgun sales regardless of venue
- Required for all sales at gun shows regardless of type of gun
- Not required at gun shows for unlicensed sellers

**Total Background Checks, 2002-2012**

- 20 million
- 18 million
- 16 million
- 14 million
- 12 million
- 10 million
- 8 million
- 6 million
- 4 million
- 2 million
- 0 million

**Sources:** FBI, National Instant Criminal Background Check System, November 1998–December 2012

**Why Denied?**

- Criminal conviction, fugitive from justice or under indictment: 80.3%
- Controlled substance abuse: 4.4%
- Prohibited by state law: 4.3%
- Restraining order for domestic violence: 1.2%
- Illegal alien: 1%
- Renounced his or her U.S. citizenship: 0.6%
- Other: 8.3%

**FBI Criteria**

A permit may be denied if someone has:
- Been convicted of or indicted for a crime punishable by more than one year in prison.
- Been convicted of a state misdemeanor punishable by more than two years in prison.
- A felony or misdemeanor warrant out for their arrest.
- An addiction to a controlled substance.
- Been issued a protective or restraining order.
- Been convicted of a misdemeanor in a domestic dispute that involved the use of physical force or a deadly weapon.
- Been judged in court to be mentally defective.
- Been involuntarily committed to a mental institution or is incompetent to handle his or her personal affairs.
- Entered the United States illegally or with a nonimmigrant visa.
- Renounced his or her U.S. citizenship.
- Been dishonorably discharged from the armed forces.
- Been denied by a state.