



**A Proclamation of the Pierce County Council and Executive Designating
June 2026 as "Gun Violence Awareness Month" in Pierce County, Washington.**

Whereas, gun violence is a public health crisis that touches every community in America, claiming more than 100 lives every day and leaving families, friends, and neighborhoods to grieve losses that ripple across generations; and

Whereas, in 2024, an estimated 915 people died from gun-related injuries in Washington State, at a rate of approximately 11 per 100,000 residents, with roughly 70.7 percent of those deaths the result of suicide and the great majority of the remainder homicides; and

Whereas, firearms are now the leading cause of death for American youth ages 11-18, according to a Washington State University study published in 2025, with research showing that gun-inflicted injuries surpassed motor-vehicle collisions as the leading cause of mortality among urban high-school-aged children, and that firearm deaths are climbing sharply among rural high-school-aged children as well; and

Whereas, according to The News Tribune, 49 people lost their lives to homicide in Pierce County in 2025, with approximately 71 percent of victims killed by gunfire; and

Whereas, in 2025 the Pierce County Sheriff's Office reported a troubling surge in violent crime, including multiple homicides involving juvenile victims and juvenile suspects, and the City of Tacoma recorded more than two dozen homicides over the course of the year, underscoring that this crisis continues to take a heavy toll on our neighborhoods; and

Whereas, the Eastside Community Center in Tacoma stands as a testament to what a community can build when it chooses hope and collective action over despair – opened in 2018, the center emerged from years of inadequate facilities, and the profound losses suffered by Eastside Tacoma families to gun violence; and

Whereas, the center was inspired in part by the memory of Billy Ray Shirley, III, a 17-year-old whose death to gun violence galvanized the community to create a safe space where Eastside youth could grow, connect, and thrive free from fear – fulfilling Billy's vision rooted in the belief that young people deserve better; and

Whereas, the center is home to a memorial artwork, In Loving Memory, created by artist Dionne Bonner and dedicated to the young people of Tacoma's Eastside whose lives were taken by gun violence – a permanent reminder of those lost and of the community's commitment never to forget them; and

Whereas, Pierce County is home to Joint Base Lewis-McChord and one of the largest military and veteran populations in Washington State, and this community bears a disproportionate share of the gun violence crisis: according to data from the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs and the Washington State Department of Health, Pierce County reports the highest number of veteran suicide deaths in the state, with 79 percent of those deaths by means of firearms; and

Whereas, resources exist to meet this moment – the 9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline offers specialized, culturally competent support, including the Veterans Crisis Line (press 1), a Spanish Language Line (press 2), and the Native and Strong Lifeline connecting American Indian and Alaska Native residents to Native crisis counselors (press 4); the 9-8-8 service is also fully accessible around the clock, with videophone access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing residents via 7-1-1 then 9-8-8, and interpretation available in more than 240 languages; and

Whereas, Gun Violence Awareness Month was inspired by the friends of Hadiya Pendleton, a 15-year-old honors student who was shot and killed in Chicago in January 2013, one week after performing at the second presidential inauguration of Barack Obama; and

Whereas, on what would have been Hadiya's 16th birthday, her classmates honored her memory by wearing orange – the color hunters wear in the field to signal their presence and protect one another from harm; and

Whereas, since the first Wear Orange Commemoration in 2015, the movement has grown into a national observance that brings together survivors, advocates, faith leaders, law enforcement officers, educators, healthcare workers, and elected officials in a shared commitment to reducing gun violence; and

Whereas, lives can be saved through proven strategies, including responsible storage of firearms, expanded access to mental health and suicide prevention services, investment in community-based violence intervention programs, support for survivors and victims' families, and strong partnerships among residents, schools, law enforcement, and public health professionals; **NOW, THEREFORE,**


BE IT PROCLAIMED on this 26th day of May 2026 by the Pierce County Council and Executive that June 2026 is hereby designated "Gun Violence Awareness Month" in Pierce County, Washington. We encourage all residents to wear orange on June 5-7, 2026, in solidarity with those affected by gun violence, and to engage with local efforts through schools, faith communities, healthcare providers, and neighborhood organizations to make Pierce County safer for everyone.


PIERCE COUNTY EXECUTIVE



Ryan N. Mello, Pierce County Executive

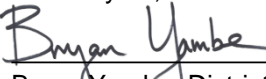
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