



CT Against Gun Violence

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Testimony to the Judiciary Committee
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CT Against Gun Violence (CAGV) supports HB 5818, AN ACT CONCERNING THE LOSS OR THEFT OF A FIREARM.

Over the past three years, 204 CT residents were murdered by firearms. And firearms played a role in over 6,000 additional violent crimes.¹ These crimes occurred throughout CT; 75 different communities reported at least one gun-related incident in the last 12 months (list attached, page 6).

Most gun crimes are committed by people who cannot legally own guns. 75% of the guns seized by the New Haven police in 2005 belonged to convicted felons². The question that must be answered is, "Where did they get the gun?"

When a criminal or other prohibited user commits a gun crime, two crimes have been committed: the crime being investigated, and the trafficking crime that put that gun in the hands of the criminal.

Until recently, the focus has been to prosecute criminal possession while turning away from the trafficking problem. By then, someone is often already dead. CT must begin to take a more preventive approach, and stop the flow of guns into the hands of criminals. Data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives reports that arresting a trafficker prevents an average of 37 crime-guns from entering the community, and disrupting illegal diversion schemes prevents an average of 354 crime-guns from entering the community.³

HB 5818 is an important first step to addressing this problem. The bill eliminates the loophole in current law which allows "straw purchasers" to claim that the gun was stolen, ending the chain of ownership necessary for successful prosecution.

Stolen firearms play a prominent role in arming criminals. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives reports that 26% of trafficked firearms had been stolen.⁴ The Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy & Research reports that 21% of armed criminals obtained guns from groups known to steal guns, such as drug dealers, addicts, and other street sources.⁵

How many guns are stolen? A study by the Police Foundation estimated that 500,000 firearms are stolen in the United States annually⁶. In CT during 1999-2000, 1,609 guns were reported stolen (approximately 800 per year)⁷. There is no way to know how many other guns have been stolen and not reported; but using the national figures, it could be as many as 2,300 per year.



CT residents support this proposal. In a survey conducted by the Center for Research & Public Policy, the polling arm of Sacred Heart University, 98% of Connecticut residents supported the requirement that stolen firearms be reported to authorities. Handgun and long gun owners supported the requirement at levels of 96% each (chart attached, p. 4). In fact, most people cannot believe that such a law does not already exist.

HB 5818 has overwhelming support. 98% of Connecticut residents surveyed support it, along with the Mayors of Hartford, New Haven, and New London; and groups like the CT Catholic Conference, CT State Medical Society, CT PTA, and the CT State Police Union (see complete list, page 5). In fact, most people are shocked to learn that this law does not already exist.

CAGV recognizes that HB 5818 is not the comprehensive solution to the gun violence epidemic that we all want. But it is an important and necessary first step. Gun violence traumatizes our communities in many ways. It is not just the physical injury to the victim; it is also the psychological impact of victimization; the dislocation of children; the disruption of health and education; the economic impact; and the promotion of a culture of violence and the fear that culture induces.

For the safety of our families, our communities, our children, we urge your support of HB 5818. Thank you.

Attachments:

- Data on stolen firearms**
- Survey support**
- Coalition support**
- Towns affected since 3/1/05**
- Endnotes**