

**Written Testimony of the Honorable Eddie A. Perez, Mayor
Hartford, CT
March 24, 2006
For H.B. 5818, "An Act Concerning Lost Or Stolen Firearms"**

I would like to commend state and local leaders, police officials, and citizen groups for continuing to advocate for safer communities in the State of Connecticut. Everyday in Hartford, the City's officers are working diligently to provide a safer community with less gun violence. Last year, Hartford police took more than 350 illegal guns off the street. It is extremely important that we, as elected leaders, continue to give law enforcement officials the necessary tools that they need to make the entire State of Connecticut a safer place to live and raise a family.

H.B. 5818 is a positive step forward in the continued fight to regulate the illegal possession of firearms in the State and make sure that guns are not being distributed into our communities without proper authorities knowing about it. I support this bill along with State leaders, police officials, and Connecticut residents, many of whom are gun owners. This bill is not about curbing an individual's right to legally possess a firearm. It helps to assure that the legal purchase and possession of a firearm does not develop into the illegal distribution of that firearm to an unregistered and unknown third party.

This bill represents a proactive attempt to hold gun owners responsible for safeguarding their weapons. It requires that gun owners maintain and store their firearms in a way that reduces the risk of theft or transfer to another person. This will help to cut down not only on theft from outside the home, but just as importantly, it addresses the issue of theft by children and young adults within the home.

The bill also requires that stolen firearms be reported within seventy-two hours. I believe that this part of the bill addresses one of the biggest problems that law enforcement is currently encountering when trying to establish the chain of possession in cases involving firearms. Currently, an individual is able to simply say that their firearm was stolen, and they have no legal responsibility to report the stolen firearm to the authorities. This reality is costing police authorities precious time and energy in pursuing criminal acts associated with guns. It allows law enforcement officials to monitor firearms more closely than they are currently able to which will result in a large number of illegal guns being off the streets in a more timely and safe manner.

The only gun owners that this bill will adversely affect are those that are seeking to distribute their guns illegally to third parties without police authorities finding out. A good example of the timeliness and importance of this bill is the recent arrest of a man who is charged with distributing legally purchased guns onto the streets in exchange for drugs. When the police raided his house, they found hundreds of legally purchased guns that he was allegedly planning on trading for drugs and putting in the hands of unregistered and unmonitored individuals. It is difficult to determine, other than those

guns that had already made it to the streets, how many of those firearms would have been passed illegally to third parties if police authorities had not caught this individual.

This past Wednesday a federal grand jury indicted Dr. David Muska from East Windsor who had legally amassed an arsenal of 100 weapons including assault weapons and a 50-caliber rifle. This individual allegedly became addicted to drugs and began trading his weapons on the street for drugs. A Hartford police officer that recovered a weapon belonging to this individual launched the state and federal investigation that eventually resulted in these indictments. However, the investigation was much more difficult because the individual claimed the guns he had traded for drugs were lost or stolen. This legislation would have made the investigation much easier and prevented more weapons from being sold on our streets. The actions of people like Dr. Muska are the reason we need this law passed.

What is known is that too often in the recent past, disputes are being settled with guns. Throughout the State, authorities are struggling with not having the appropriate enforcement tools to properly and expeditiously investigate, solve, and prosecute cases of gun violence. It is time for the elected leaders of Connecticut to provide these enforcement tools and send a message to those that wish to illegally distribute guns onto the streets of our State that they will be caught and held accountable for their actions.

Thank you.