

To: Public Safety Committee

Subject: Gun Violence

There are an estimated 300 million guns in America today. That amount is beyond critical mass and produces a chain reaction. As gun sales continue to grow, more people feel the need for more guns to protect themselves. But, ironically, as more individuals arm themselves, they and all of us become less safe.

Is it safe to drive a car when fender-benders can become fatal accidents with drivers who are armed and angry? When road rage escalates from angry words to deadly bullets? When a driver is cut off and blasts his gun not his horn?

These are not "bad guys". They are real people who lose control and rationality in situations of extreme emotional stress and have too ready access to weapons of lethal force.

So in a country awash with guns, bad umpires are not just booed but shot and killed. Fist fights don't stop with bloody noses but with corpses. Fired employees respond with deadly force and people die. They say that breaking up is hard to do, but with guns involved it can be fatal.

Inevitably, the sheer number of guns in our society assures that way too many will fall into the hands of people who shouldn't have them, whether criminals or mentally disturbed. This despite locks, safes, or good intentions of lawful owners.

We need to reduce, not increase, the overwhelming firepower available to individual citizens today.

Guns with rapid fire, high volume capability should be available only to law enforcement and military personnel, to whom they are issued under strict authorization, with training requirements and personnel fitness monitoring.

In current parlance, this restriction is referred to as "banning assault weapons and high capacity magazines", but some quibble with those terms. It should be possible for legislators to craft an acceptable, high-level definition of the class of weapons to be banned based on how the weapons can be used

For example, "weapons proscribed for civilian use include any gun with rapid firing and high volume capability that can facilitate a mass killing spree". This or similar, basic definition can be augmented with guidelines, such as firing rates for example, but the definition process should not get bogged down or distracted with the minutiae of design options - stocks, grips, etc.

At that point, an executive branch agency can be authorized to establish and update the specific list of weapons to be banned for civilian use, guided by the basic legislative definition and with oversight by the General Assembly.

Such a list of banned weapons would not infringe the right of citizens to bear arms of a type, level and amount appropriate for civilian use, although some may view it that way. Guns for hunting, shooting, home and personal protection would not be proscribed.

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