

January 28, 2013

Connecticut Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety

Re: Testimony – Gun Violence Prevention Working Group

Dear Members of the Committee;

First I want to say that I was also sickened by the senseless violence committed by Adam Lanza against the children and teachers of Newtown this past December 14th. It was more than quite a shock for me to return to the USA on December 15th, from a week of being out of the country, to the horrifying headlines describing this terrible tragedy. Over the past number of weeks this remains on my mind, and will for a very long time.

Also on my mind is the plethora of new gun control legislation being heaped into the shadow of this tragedy. I will not question motives here, but I am not at all comfortable with this hastily constructed mountain of proposed legislation. Only a small portion of the proposed legislation is intelligent and would be logically supportive and accretive to Connecticut's current strict gun laws. The majority of this proposed legislation is not. I ask that you do not support, the following currently proposed legislation, or any similarly proposed legislation to:

HB-5112, HB-5268, HB-5452, HB-5647, HB-5651, HB-5954, HB-5955, HB-5956, HB-5957, HB-6215, HB-6216, SB-122, SB-124, SB-140, SB-161, SB-501, SB-504, SB-600, SB-601, SB-605, SB-606, SB-608 thru SB-611, SB-613, SB-676, SB-711, SB-739, SB-742, SB-745, SB-780, SB-781....

An intelligent approach to "gun control" in the light of the Newtown tragedy would not begin with gun control. We would first begin by addressing mental health and the mentally ill. At the same time we would address security in and around our schools (and other "gun free" areas where people congregate and are essentially defenseless). Only after these issues have been adequately confronted and addressed, should we look at further gun control, and then only at "intelligent" gun control. Intelligent gun control does not seek to "confiscate" the rifles and pistols of the responsible, lawful and law abiding Connecticut citizen, either by ban or by outright taking, nor does it seek to restrict or to impede access to firearms or to ammunition to the responsible, lawful, law abiding Connecticut citizen. Intelligent gun control seeks to keep firearms out of the hands of the mentally ill, the criminal element, and the lawless. And, intelligent gun control would address gun violence where it truly lives – in our major cities.

Connecticut already has effective and comprehensive gun control laws. Improvement can be made in the following areas:

- 1) Every sale and or transfer of a firearm, regardless of where the sale or transfer takes place, and regardless of the transacting parties, should be subjected to a criminal background check.
- 2) Expand form DPS-67-C, question d. to include “OR are you being currently treated for any mental illness OR have you been treated for any mental illness within the past 12 months”.
- 3) The health care community of the State of Connecticut should be required to report those individuals who have been diagnosed and/or who are being treated for mental illness to state law enforcement, and there should be a strict protocol to restrict these individuals from having, or from gaining access to, firearms.
- 4) Require that ALL the information that is requested on DPS-67-C (and Federal ATF Form 4473 for that matter) be placed into the background check database used by the state’s Special Licensing and Firearms Unit.

I have seen some of the proposed legislation going in this direction. If there would have been a requirement to report to state and/or local law enforcement the fact that Adam Lanza was diagnosed, and/or was being treated for a mental health problem, and if state or local laws and/or law enforcement were required to prevent Adam from having or from gaining access to any firearms, e.g., like at his residence, which was his mother’s residence, and if state or local law and/or law enforcement would have required these firearms to be either removed from the residence or to be secured to the satisfaction of state and/or local law enforcement, then, maybe then, the horrible tragedy of Sandy Hook would have been prevented and future Sandy Hooks be prevented.

Before I close, I would like the Committee to consider the following:

First, I urge you to reject any legislation that seeks to overturn 50+ years of civilian, private citizen ownership and possession of semi-automatic firearms (either rifles or pistols). These firearms have been used over the past 50+ years to protect the individual lives, liberty, and property of American and Connecticut citizens in the best manner they can. To strip responsible, lawful, law abiding citizens of these types of firearms, regardless of appearance, is confiscation, whether by ban or by outright taking. Such confiscation - to essentially deny responsible, lawful, law abiding citizens the means to protect their lives, their families, and their property in the best manner possible - would be an infringement of our Second Amendment rights and our Article I, Sec. 15 rights as declared in the Constitution of the State of Connecticut. Therefore, I urge you to reject any legislation brought before the State Assembly that first seeks only to deny, i.e., “confiscate”, and then only seeks to address the root cause of the Newtown tragedy as an afterthought.

To say that semi-automatic firearms, either rifles or pistols, have no place in the home, and/or are not hunting or sporting rifles is simply false. I have read recently that the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is seeking to acquire 7,000 5.56x45mm NATO “personal defense weapons”; rifles that are labeled “assault weapons” when owned by civilians. Yes, the request is

for the “selective fire” version (select-fire meaning that the weapon can be both semi-automatic and automatic), but as you know, civilians have been prohibited from obtaining selective-fire rifles since 1986, and these types of rifles are currently illegal in Connecticut.

The DHS is asking for these rifles because they are “suitable for personal defense use in close quarters” in the face of threats. What about the semi-automatic version of these rifles? Is a semi-automatic rifle unacceptable for the civilian citizen’s “personal defense” in his or her home? According to what I am hearing from my elected representatives, it appears that the answer is yes. Essentially, I see their hypocrisy hanging out by saying that these weapons are good “personal defense” for them, but not for me and my fellow responsible, lawful, law abiding citizens. According to my elected representatives, when civilians own semi-automatic rifles, they somehow become “assault weapons.”

We all know, but refuse to admit, that the designation of a firearm as an “assault weapon” is strictly a matter of opinion and is based solely upon cosmetics. Beauty, or ugliness, is truly in the eye of the beholder here. Unfortunately, the eye of the beholder, or what is commonly known as “personal opinion”, has become law, and opinion is again the sole basis for the proposed new regulations attempting to define an “assault weapon”. Again, I urge you to reject any legislation that seeks to overturn 50+ years of civilian, private citizen ownership and possession of semi-automatic firearms (either rifles or pistols).

Second, I do not support, and I ask that you do not support, any legislation that seeks to restrict or to impede access to ammunition to the responsible, lawful, law abiding, legal, and/or permitted Connecticut gun owner. If we can agree to the logic that only an individual that lawfully possesses a firearm would purchase ammunition, and that intelligent gun control that seeks to keep firearms out of the hands of the criminal element and the lawless is effectively and aggressively enforced, then most of the additional proposed restrictions on the purchase of ammunition are superfluous. I also ask that you reject any proposal calling for the imposition of an additional tax over and above normal sales taxes that would be placed on the sale of ammunition. Such a tax is grossly punitive; a punishment directed solely at a bloc of Connecticut citizens who had nothing to do with Sandy Hook.

Third, I urge you to focus long and hard on restrictions limiting the capacity of detachable magazines. Responsible, lawful, law abiding gun owners should not be limited to detachable magazines holding only 10 rounds, especially those magazines that hold more than 10 rounds that are normally designed, shipped and sold with today’s handguns. Why should someone who is acting to protect themselves, their home, and their family, be forced by law to a disadvantage against a lawless perpetrator (or perpetrators) most likely carrying an illegal gun, and that gun most likely containing a high capacity magazine. I can see agreeing to a compromise with regards to detachable rifle magazines, however a limit here should be reasonable, and it must be set to, again, not legislate responsible, lawful, law abiding citizens to a disadvantage against the lawless perpetrator. Is the Cheshire home invasion no longer relevant to this debate? Lastly, if we do establish a reasonable capacity limit for rifle detachable magazines, why then restrict, or place any further restrictions on semi-automatic rifles?

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I am very much in favor of sound, intelligent and rational solutions that can effectively coexist with our right to keep and bear arms in order to prevent another Newtown from ever happening again. However, I urge you to not follow the Lemmings, and to not take the easy way out. Doing the intelligent thing takes time, welcomes the opinion of all constituents, and, above all, demands courage. Please have the courage to address what really set in motion the events of Newtown: a mentally ill person; a mentally ill person getting access to firearms; a mentally ill person invading a gun-free area – an elementary school.

Sincerely,

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