



**STATEMENT OF INTEREST:
GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION LEGISLATION**

**To: Gun Violence Prevention Working Group
Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention & Children's Safety**

Date: Monday, January 28, 2013

**LWVCT URGES SUPPORT FOR SENSIBLE LEGISLATION TO REDUCE
GUN VIOLENCE IN CONNECTICUT**

Comments submitted by Social Policy Director Alison Rivard

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut is a nonpartisan organization with over 1800 members statewide, dedicated to encouraging the informed and active participation in government and increasing the understanding of major public policy issues. The League of Women Voters first adopted a position on gun laws in 1990 and began urging Congress to control the proliferation of handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons. The LWV position also supports licensing/permitting procedures for gun ownership to include background checks, gun safety education and periodic renewals.

In Connecticut, LWVCT has supported strong measures to protect the health and safety of citizens through limiting the accessibility and regulating the ownership of handguns and semi-automatic weapons. LWVCT advocated for CT's 1994 assault weapons ban, the 2007 law mandating the reporting of a theft or loss of a firearm, and offered testimony in 2011 supporting a ban on large capacity ammunition magazines.

At this time, we urge your committee to recommend the following legislative proposals:

- ***Universal background checks on all gun sales and transfers in CT.***

Currently in CT, background checks are required for all firearms transfers by licensed gun dealers (no gun show loophole) and for the transfer of handguns between individuals. With the requested change, private sales or transfers of long guns between individuals would also require a background check. It is anticipated that there would be limited exceptions for temporary transfers for hunting and sporting purposes and certain intra-family transfers.

Universal background checks throughout the country could have the most significant impact on public safety—changing the current reality that an estimated 40% of all gun sales occur nationally without background checks. The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (“NICS”) database, which the FBI uses to perform background checks, has kept more than 1.5 million guns out of the hands of prohibited purchasers over the last 14 years and is capable of making 92% of background checks on the spot.

Here in CT, universal background checks will offer increased public protection. As a “point of contact” state which conducts its own background checks for gun purchases, CT and the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, which processes the background checks, has access to both the NICS and to state records and files. We are better able than many states to use background checks to ensure that people seeking to buy firearms are not prohibited persons under the expanded mental health and other categories utilized in this state.

Allowing dangerous persons, such as convicted felons and those who have outstanding restraint orders against them, to buy guns from unlicensed sellers without a criminal background check threatens the safety of our families and communities.

- ***Ban the possession or transfer of high capacity ammunition magazines carrying more than 7 rounds.***

Standard hunting rifles are usually equipped with no more than 5-shot magazines. Standard revolvers are 6-shot, and standard pistol magazines hold 6-10 rounds. But large capacity ammunition magazines can hold 30, 50 or even 100 rounds, enabling shooters to injure or kill many people in seconds before needing to reload. Semi-automatic pistols with large capacity magazines can fire at a rate of more than 6 shots per second for well trained shooters, according to the FBI, or about 30 shots every 5 seconds .¹

¹ BradyCampaign.org, High Capacity Magazines, citing Palmer, Brian, “How Many Times Can You Shoot a Handgun in Seven Minutes? More than a thousand,” *Slate*, Nov. 9, 2009.

It is imperative to get high capacity ammunition magazines off our streets. The shooters in our recent mass killings have used these assault clips that now equip many handguns and rifles. The expired federal assault weapons ban focused on a ban of magazines of "more than 10 rounds." There is now a regional precedent for lowering the capacity to 7 rounds—a provision that was included in the New York legislation adopted this month. CT should follow New York's lead and adopt a ban on high capacity magazines of more than 7 rounds.

- ***Strengthen CT's assault weapons ban***

To protect law enforcement and improve public safety, we need to strengthen CT's ban on assault weapons, by defining weapons based on functionality features and improving the current list of firearms included in state statutes. Only semi-automatic firearms with military-style features would be banned. Traditional long guns designed for use in hunting and recreational activities would not be affected.

The types of military-style features which are not needed for legitimate hunting and shooting purposes include:

- A folding stock which facilitates maximum concealability and mobility in close combat.
- A pistol grip which facilitates spray-fire from the hip without losing control and one-handed shooting.
- A barrel shroud which enables the shooter to shoot many rounds.
- A threaded barrel designed to accommodate a flash suppressor which allows the shooter to remain concealed when shooting at night.
- A threaded barrel designed to accommodate a silencer which allows an assassin to shoot without making noise.
- A barrel mount designed to accommodate a bayonet which allows someone to stab a person at close quarters in battle. See www.Bradycampaign.org/legislation

CT should enact a comprehensive assault weapons ban, modeled after the California law, which bans firearms with one or more military-style features.

- ***Strengthen existing law on safe storage of firearms***

Current CT law prohibits any person from storing a loaded firearm on his or her premises if he or she knows or reasonably should know that a minor (person under age 16) is likely to gain access to the firearm without the permission of the minor's parent or guardian. This provision should be expanded to include access to the firearm by any dangerous person, such as those who would be prohibited persons unable to obtain a handgun permit under CT law.

The law offers protection from liability for responsible gun owners who keep a firearm safe by either having it "securely locked in a box or other container in a location which a reasonable person would believe to be secure," or by "carr[ying] the firearm on his or her

person or within such close proximity that he or she can readily retrieve and use it as if it were on his or her body.”

- ***Consider expansion of the CT permit requirement to carrying long guns in public.***

CT already has a permit requirement for the open or concealed carry of handguns, so that this administrative process is already in place. Currently, an 18 year old can purchase a semi-automatic hunting rifle with only a 2 week waiting period. Extending the permit requirement to the purchase and carry of rifles and shotguns would increase the safety of our families and communities without significant burden—one permit would be required for the purchase and carry of either a handgun or a long gun.

LWVCT will monitor legislation and may speak in support or in opposition to related legislation in the future. At this time, we urge your support for universal background checks, a ban on high capacity ammunition magazines, a better assault weapons ban and updated requirements for safe storage of firearms.

Respectfully submitted,

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For more information, please contact President@lwvct.org or socialpolicydirector@lwvct.org

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