

NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERSHIP TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

TESTIMONY FOR CHIEF JIM JOHNSON, BALTIMORE COUNTY, MARYLAND CHAIR, NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERSHIP TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

**Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing
Wednesday, January 30, 2013**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am here on behalf of the National Law Enforcement Partnership to Prevent Gun Violence, an alliance of the nation's law enforcement leadership organizations concerned about the unacceptable level of gun violence in the United States.

The Partnership, founded in 2010, includes: the Commission on Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies; Hispanic American Police Command Officers Association; International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators; International Association of Chiefs of Police; Major Cities Chiefs Association; National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives; National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives; Police Executive Research Forum; and the Police Foundation.

We mourn those lost to gun violence, including the 20 children in Newtown, along with the six brave adults whose lives were cut short by a deranged individual armed with firepower originally designed for combat, not for gunning down innocent members of our communities.

More than 30 homicides occur in America each day. Two-thousand children, ages 18 and under, die of firearm-related deaths in the U.S. every year. In 2011, for the first time in 14 years, firearms were the leading cause of death for police officers killed in the line of duty. In just the two-week period after the Newtown massacre, six police officers were killed and 10 injured in 12 separate shootings.

In a one-week period in 2011, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) found that gun crime in six cities cost more than \$38 million, and in the year 2010 cost the entire country more than \$57 billion.

We urgently need Congress to address the rising epidemic of gun violence. Law enforcement leaders support the President's comprehensive approach, which includes enhancing safety at educational institutions and addressing mental health issues. But on behalf of my colleagues across the nation, I am here today to tell you that we are long overdue in strengthening our nation's gun laws. Doing so must be a priority for Congress.

The organizations in the National Law Enforcement Partnership to Prevent Gun Violence are united in urgently calling on Congress to:

- Require background checks for *all* firearm purchasers;
- Ensure that prohibited purchaser records in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), are up-to-date and accurate; and
- Limit high capacity ammunition feeding devices to ten rounds.

Seven of our nine groups, including the largest organizations among us, also support a ban on assault weapons and Senator Feinstein's legislation.

Federal law prohibits dangerous individuals, such as convicted felons and those with mental health disqualifiers, from possessing firearms. While background checks are required for purchases through federally licensed gun dealers, no check is required for private sales, such as those through Internet postings, print ads or gun shows.

From November 2011 to November 2012, an estimated 6.6 million firearm transactions occurred without a background check. Up to 40 percent of firearm transactions occur through private individuals rather than licensed gun dealers. Allowing 40 percent of those acquiring guns to bypass background checks is like allowing 40 percent of airline passengers to board a plane without going through airport security.

Last October, in Brookfield, Wisconsin, seven women were shot by a prohibited purchaser who was under a domestic violence restraining order. The shooter answered an online ad and was able to buy a gun without a background check. Had the sale required a check, this tragedy could have been prevented.

Background checks work. They stopped nearly 2 million prohibited purchases between 1994 and 2009. We already have a national background check system in place. Therefore, extending background checks to *all* firearm purchasers can easily be implemented – and should be, without delay.

States can't do it alone. Interstate firearms trafficking is a serious problem that must be addressed federally. The problem is rampant: According to the ATF, in 2009, 30 percent of guns recovered at crime scenes had crossed state lines.

Submissions to NICS must be improved, especially mental health and drug abuse records. The 2007 massacre at Virginia Tech is a tragic example of a prohibited purchaser slipping between the cracks due to incomplete NICS records.

The ban on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines must be reinstated. Like assault weapons, high-capacity magazines are not used for hunting, do not belong in our homes and wreak havoc in our communities. Banning these magazines will reduce the number of bullets a shooter can use before having to reload. Reloading can provide a window of time in which to take down a shooter, as we saw in Tucson.

In 1998, four years after the assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazine ban was enacted, the percentage of firearms with large-capacity magazines recovered by Virginia police decreased and continued to drop until it hit a low of 9 percent in 2004, the year the ban expired. It hit a high of 20 percent in 2010, according to a Washington Post analysis.

After the 1994 law expired, 37 percent of police agencies saw increases in criminals' use of

assault weapons, according to a 2010 PERF survey.

I have been in law enforcement for nearly 35 years, and have seen an explosion in firepower since the assault weapons ban expired. It is common to find many shell casings at crime scenes these days, as victims are being riddled with multiple gunshots.

The common-sense measures we are calling for will not infringe on Second Amendment rights, but will ensure that we keep guns out of dangerous hands and excessive firepower out of our communities.

Generations of Americans, including our youngest ones, are depending on you to ensure they will grow up and fulfill their roles in the great human experience. None of us can fail them. I urge you to follow the will of the American public and stand with law enforcement to enact these common-sense public safety measures.

Thank you.