

NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERSHIP TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
July 17, 2012

info@lepartnership.org

AS FIREARMS RISE TO # 1 CAUSE OF COPS' LINE-OF-DUTY DEATHS, WISCONSIN AND NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERS CALL FOR EXPANDING BACKGROUND CHECKS ON FIREARM PURCHASERS

Police Officials Meet with Wisconsin U.S. Senate Candidates to Discuss Vital Public Safety Concerns

(MADISON) – Police leaders from Wisconsin and major national law enforcement leadership organizations today announced their call for strengthening background checks on firearm purchasers to prevent criminals and other dangerous people currently prohibited by law to possess guns from obtaining them. The call, issued at a Madison press conference, comes after the release of data that shows that for the first time in 14 years, firearms surpassed motor vehicles as the number one cause of death for officers in the line of duty in 2011, according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund.

The police administrators from the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association (WCPA) and the National Law Enforcement Partnership to Prevent Gun Violence (NLEPPGV) issued their call while assembled in the state capital to meet with candidates for Wisconsin's highly contested U.S. Senate seat. Police expressed their viewpoints on several critical public safety concerns, prioritizing strengthening the background check requirement for firearm purchasers and improving the reporting of record histories of disqualified purchasers to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). They also talked with candidates about the importance of opposing federal preemption of state carrying concealed weapons legislation.

All Senate candidates from both parties were invited to meet with the law enforcement delegation, which included active-duty police chiefs and sheriffs from Wisconsin. During this two-day gathering, the law enforcement administrators met with Tommy Thompson (R) and Eric Hovde (R). Jeff Fitzgerald (R) was scheduled to meet Monday, but he cancelled the meeting. Tammy Baldwin (D) and Mark Neumann (R) indicated an interest in meeting, but they had scheduling conflicts. The officials are working with the Baldwin campaign to schedule a time to meet in the future. The WCPA hopes to meet with Jeff Fitzgerald and Mark Neumann as well.

To ensure a fruitful discussion, the meetings were held in two private sessions, and the ground rules stated that candidates' comments would not be shared publicly. The meetings are nonpartisan and informational only; they will not result in an endorsement of any candidate.

"We were pleased to have one-on-one meetings with several U.S. Senate candidates in which we could speak candidly about needed federal efforts to reduce gun violence and enhance public safety," said Douglas H. Pettit, chief of police in Oregon, WI, and chair of the law enforcement meeting. "The goal of these meetings was to impart our expertise, not issue

endorsements. It is encouraging that even in a highly contested race, these candidates dedicated their time to hearing the concerns of law enforcement leaders.”

The meeting was held at The Concourse Hotel, One West Dayton Street, in downtown Madison.

“Every minute of every day, thousands of law enforcement officers are risking their lives for the citizens of their communities. Their jobs have become more risky and dangerous, in part, because people with dangerous intent are able to purchase guns and use them to kill innocent individuals and the officers sworn to protect the public,” said Hubert Williams, President of the Police Foundation and Chair of the National Law Enforcement Partnership to Prevent Gun Violence, a coalition of major national law enforcement leadership organizations. “That is why law enforcement leaders have united to press for a federal law requiring background checks for firearms purchasers. A patchwork of state laws leaves wiggle room for criminals to maneuver and obtain weapons illegally.”

Background checks register near-unanimous public support. 93% of Wisconsinites support requiring a background check before purchasing or carrying a gun. Nationally, 81% of gun owners support background checks for gun purchases at any venue.

The federal Brady Law, which requires background checks on firearms purchased through federally licensed dealers, has a proven track record of blocking firearm sales to prohibited purchasers. Those who are legally prohibited from possessing firearms include convicted felons, fugitives, drug addicts, those under domestic violence restraining orders, and those who have been adjudicated mentally ill, for example.

Background checks are highly effective: in the first 15 years after the Brady Law’s enactment, background checks stopped nearly 2 million prohibited purchasers. However, an estimated 40 percent of firearms transactions occur at transaction points where the Brady Law does not apply. The result is that criminals, felons, fugitives and other dangerous people are currently buying guns on the honor system. The omission of background checks for sales through the secondary market is permitting guns to get into the wrong hands and is aiding and abetting illegal gun trafficking.

In addition to Pettit and Williams, participants at the press conference, included:

Chief Bernard Coughlin, Verona Police Department
Chief Tom Czaja, Fox Point Police Department
Chief Kurt Heuer, Wisconsin Rapids Police Department
Sheriff David J. Mahoney, Dane County Sheriff’s Office
Sheriff Steven R. Michek, Iowa County Sheriff’s Office and President, Badger State Sheriff’s Association
Chief Dennis Plantz, Berlin Police Chief and President, WCPA
Chief Susan Riseling, Chief of Police/Associate Vice Chancellor, University of Wisconsin-Madison, representing the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives (NAWLEE)
Chief Gerald Strunz, Sauk Prairie Police Department
Chief Lisa Walter, University of Wisconsin-Stout, representing the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA)