



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MASSACHUSETTS

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League of Women Voters of Massachusetts Statement on Gun Safety Legislation

Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security hearing September 13, 2012

It is time for Massachusetts to adopt legislation that will help remove the growing number of illegal, unlicensed and excessively dangerous weapons from our communities. On careful review of the multiple bills introduced in the current legislative session and of the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) and League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) positions on gun control, LWVMA has determined that the following components are essential to achieving this goal:

- Universal and effective background checks - Ample statistics from many sources show that in Massachusetts, as in the rest of the nation, background checks have strong public support. For these to be effective, however, legislation must bring Massachusetts into compliance with the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), passed in 2007. We strongly urge no exceptions to background checks. Background checks for all gun purchases no matter where, when or how transacted must be mandatory.
- Changes to reporting systems, including mental health records from all institutions, with appropriate controls to assure privacy and in a way that prevents release of more than minimally-required information
- Better controls to prevent so-called straw purchases (i.e. when a person with a clean background purchases firearms on behalf of a person prohibited from purchasing a firearm), including limiting the number of purchases an individual may make. Such controls would help reduce urban violence. Proposed legislation should take into consideration victims of domestic abuse who are forced to choose between buying a gun which could lead to violence or being further abused.
- Detention for presumed dangerousness for a felony involving the use of a firearm
- Expansion of the existing assault weapons ban, further limitations on magazine size, and the ending of grandfather clauses
- Allowing police to destroy instead of reselling weapons and ammunition
- Stiffer penalties for individuals circumventing gun control laws

It is our understanding that your committee intends to write a bill based on input from these public hearings and informed by the many bills filed this session. We believe that most elements of the Governor's bill, H.47, address the issues effectively. The limitation of "possession, storage and use of assault weapons, large capacity weapons..." to properly licensed gun clubs and their use only by members with a valid firearm identification card or those being supervised by a certified firearms safety instructor and a requirement for liability insurance proposed in Rep. Linsky's bill, H.3253, should be given serious consideration.

Local Leagues, with the support of LWVMA, have participated in the joint committee hearings and in gun violence forums across the state, working to educate and activate our members and our communities. LWVMA will continue to follow closely the development of the gun control legislation proposed by your committee and support our membership in lobbying their individual representatives and senators as legislation moves forward to strengthen and expand to Massachusetts' existing gun controls.

We thank you for your continuing efforts to ensure the safety of all Massachusetts residents.