

NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERSHIP TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

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info@lepartnership.org

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

Police Groups Meet with Virginia's U.S. Senate Candidates to Discuss Vital Public Safety Concerns

(RICHMOND) Today in Richmond, police leaders from the Commonwealth and major national law enforcement leadership organizations announced their call for strengthening background checks on firearm purchasers to ensure that criminals and other dangerous people currently prohibited by law from possessing guns do not obtain them illegally. The call comes on the heels of the release of data for 2011 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, according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund.

The police representatives from the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police (VACP) and the National Law Enforcement Partnership to Prevent Gun Violence (NLEPPGV) issued their call while assembled in Richmond to meet with the candidates for Virginia's highly contested U.S. Senate seat, George Allen (R) and Tim Kaine (D). Police expressed their viewpoints on a range of critical public safety concerns, including expanding the background check requirement for firearm purchasers, improving the quality of record systems, and other measures to keep communities and police officers safe.

To ensure a fruitful discussion, the meetings between law enforcement and the candidates were held in private, 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.

"It was encouraging to meet with both U.S. Senate candidates and have the opportunity to discuss vital public safety matters," said Staunton Police Chief James E. Williams, 1st Vice President of the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police. "Even though the police organizations will not make endorsements, the candidates showed a willingness to listen to law enforcement leaders as they formulate their public safety policies. Law enforcement is uniting because we have seen too much gun violence; meanwhile there are effective solutions with wide public support that will positively impact it. We just need federal lawmakers to act."

Chief Williams chaired the VACP/NLEPPGV meeting, which was held at The Berkeley Hotel, 1200 East Cary Street, downtown Richmond.

“Law enforcement leaders across America have coalesced around the urgent need to prevent gun violence,” 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. “Cops’ jobs are dangerous enough, without allowing convicted felons, people who are mentally deranged and crack heads to buy guns on the honor system. State laws, alone, are insufficient to keep firearms from dangerous people. Criminals have figured out how to circumvent state laws to obtain firearms illegally. Background checks are effective in stopping illegal transactions. In fact, they are one of the most effective tools we have to stop violent crime with firearms.”

Background checks register near-unanimous public support. 89% of Virginians support requiring all gun buyers to pass a background check. Support actually rises in two Virginia Senate Districts in rural southwestern parts of the state. 96% in SD-21 and 94% in SD-38 agree that anyone who buys a gun should be required to go through a background check. Support among gun owners is equally high, with 94% of gun owners in both districts favoring background checks for anyone who buys a firearm.

Currently, the Brady Law requires background checks for firearms purchased through federally licensed dealers in an effort to block sales to prohibited purchasers under federal and state laws. Those who are legally prohibited from possessing firearms include convicted felons, fugitives, drug addicts, those under domestic violence restraining orders, and the 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 other 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 sales through the secondary market is permitting guns to get into the wrong hands and is aiding and abetting illegal gun trafficking.

“Police rely on policymakers to set the laws. Our goal today was to share our expertise and to converse with the candidates on the policies that will enhance public safety,” said Chief David McCoy, University of Richmond, and representing the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators.

The chiefs will gather just days before the FY2012-14 budget takes effect July 1. The new budget provides additional funds allocated by the Virginia General Assembly in the 2012 session to improve the state’s background check system. Citing delays for checks on firearm purchasers, some called for eliminating Virginia’s background checks on rifles and shotguns. Rather than agreeing to eliminate such checks, legislators instead – during a time of severe fiscal constraints – provided additional funds to improve the background check system.

In addition to the three speakers at the press conference, law enforcement leaders from around the state, many of whom serve on the Executive Committee of the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police, participated in the candidate meeting and press conference. They were:

Chief Douglas A. Goodman, Jr., Ashland
Chief Michael F. Lynch, George Mason University Police Department, representing
International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators
Colonel Richard J. Rappoport, Chief of Police, City of Fairfax
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Chief David C. Sloggie, Williamsburg

Police representatives from the National Law Enforcement Partnership to Prevent Gun Violence were:

Sylvester Daughtry, Jr. – Executive Director, Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies

Katherine Perez – President, National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives

Chief James W. Johnson – Baltimore County Police Department, representing Major Cities Chiefs

Chief John I. Dixon, III – City of Petersburg, representing National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives