

Pennsylvania State Police Testimony
Gun Safety Reform
Senate Judiciary Committee
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Responsibility

Good afternoon, Chairs Baker and Farnese and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. I'm Lieutenant Colonel Scott Price, the Deputy Commissioner of Administration and Professional Responsibility. On behalf of the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP), I would like to thank you for engaging in discussions about the continuing need to support programs and initiatives directed at reducing gun violence in the Commonwealth. This testimony will cover some of the steps PSP is taking to combat this crisis and address several pieces of legislation related to gun reform currently before the General Assembly.

Recently, Governor Wolf announced an Executive Order on Gun Violence Prevention. The PSP has been included in several of the preventative and proactive programs within the Executive Order which are geared toward providing greater protections for Pennsylvanians.

The Commissioner of the PSP, Colonel Robert Evanchick, will be a member of the Special Council on Gun Violence. The Council will be tasked with, among other things, making recommendations for improvement(s) on our current firearms background check system and identifying strategies to reduce incidents of firearms-related violence. PSP will also be developing best practices on gun buyback programs for police departments in an attempt to reduce gun violence in Pennsylvania's communities. We will be expanding the "See Something/Send Something" program to receive reports of suspicions of mass shootings by text and pursue a campaign to increase public awareness of the ability to alert law enforcement through the use of a phone application. In addition, PSP and the Municipal Police Officers' Education & Training Commission (MPOETC) will be collaborating with local first responders to develop training on gun

violence prevention and deterrence as well as recognition of the warning signs of potential mass shootings.

PSP is working in concert with the Office of the Attorney General to combat illegal firearms trafficking and straw purchases through the “Track + Trace” program. This partnership will identify and implement ways to more effectively address the issues of gun crime and gun violence in the Commonwealth. The Pennsylvania Instant Check System (PICS), our firearms background check system the national media recognized as a “model gun background check system” and which includes a web-based application that allows firearms dealers to ensure a gun being transferred is not stolen as well as the development of an electronic record of sale process further demonstrates our agency is committed to seeing that our law enforcement partners and licensed firearm dealers in Pennsylvania have the technology and information they need to ensure that firearms do not end up in the hands of people who are prohibited from possessing them or who want to use them to commit crimes.

The aforementioned initiatives are some meaningful steps to address this critical issue. However, support from the General Assembly is needed as well. The Pennsylvania State Police is supportive of the concepts of Universal Background Checks to ensure long guns are kept out of the hands of prohibited persons and those selling them are not unknowingly exposed to criminal and civil liability should a prospective buyer be legally precluded from owning firearms, Extreme Risk Protection Orders to temporarily remove firearms from individuals who demonstrate an extreme risk of causing harm to themselves or others, and legislation requiring lost and stolen guns be reported to law enforcement.

Several pieces of legislation presently before the General Assembly address some of these measures to increase safety for the citizens of Pennsylvania. Currently, a firearms transaction involving long guns between two private parties does not require a background check. Senate Bill 88 would require all those who wish to purchase a firearm go through a State Police background check. PSP believes this would create a uniform process in addition to keeping guns out of the hands of dangerous individuals. Senate Bill 138 would require individuals safely store firearms with a locking device or in a securely locked box or container and in a location where a minor is unlikely to gain access and accidentally hurt themselves or another person. This legislation is in line with existing guidelines PSP disseminates in brochures for Pennsylvania Firearm Purchasers. Additionally, current state law under Act 59 of 1999 prohibits licensees to sell, deliver or transfer any firearm to another person unless the transferee is provided with or purchases a locking device or the design of the firearm incorporates a locking device. Senate Bill 483 would require a person report to law enforcement within 24 hours of the discovery of the loss or theft of their firearm. Many times, when an individual illegally sells a firearm to a criminal, that person claims it was lost or stolen. Unfortunately, prosecutions against these “straw purchasers” are often difficult because there is no way to refute the assertion that the gun was lost or stolen. In its current form, the PSP has concerns about the enforceability of this bill.

The Pennsylvania State Police is supportive of these proposals. With any piece of legislation, there are often technical or implementation concerns within the language of a bill. In addition, the need to get illegal guns off the street should not infringe upon the rights of legal gun owners. The Pennsylvania State Police would like to continue to

work with the General Assembly to ensure enacted legislation curtails the devastating impact gun violence has on our communities and addresses the critical need to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. This is a complex issue and partnership is critical if we are to reduce the number of lives lost to gun violence.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to permit PSP to address the steps we are taking to improve the safety of the citizens of the Commonwealth as well as address legislation aimed at ending gun violence in Pennsylvania. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.