

Statement of Kenneth Barnes
Before the House Subcommittee on Crime
July 14, 2010

Chairperson Scott, and to members of this august committee, Congressman Castle, Congressman Quigley, and Congresswoman McCarthy. I personally know and admire Congressman Scott as well as several members of his staff, and have had the pleasure to meet personally with Congresswoman McCarthy in the past on the issue of gun violence. Thank you for the privilege and honor to be able to address you today.

It is with mixed emotions that I speak before you on a topic that is so prevalent in our society today. Though it is an honor to appear before you, it is with a deep feeling of sadness that I speak. Like my fellow speaker, Tom Mauser, my son was brutally murdered in September of 2001 by a 17 year old youth. And like Congresswoman McCarthy, we share a bond and belong to a club, a sorority/fraternity that no one wishes to belong - losing a family member to gun violence.

All across America, no matter where one travels today, newspapers and TV share the same headlines - people are being shot and murdered. Every day in America, 82 people are murdered. Right here in the Nation's capitol someone is murdered every other day and we recently experienced one of the worst drive by shootings in the history of the city - 11 young people shot and 5 murdered, after coming home from the funeral of another young person who was murdered. During the Easter weekend in Chicago, 54 people were shot and 10 murdered, and what is becoming seemingly a daily occurrence, just this past week, 3 people murdered and 13 shot in one night; this past 4th of July weekend was the deadliest in the last 5 years in Philadelphia - 8 homicides; and this is but a few examples of the carnage taking place in cities throughout America on a daily basis. In a March news report in Chicago, it is estimated that the cost factor to the ravages of gun violence to society is a staggering 2.5 billion dollars to date - and this is just in Chicago. Begin to calculate and add the cost factors in cities throughout American and the amount is mind boggling. This does not include the emotional devastation upon families, friends, and classmates of victims and to the rippling effect that takes place in the community, to include family members and friends of the perpetrators as well.

Gun violence is at epidemic proportions in America with death by gun violence being the number one killer of African American males age 15 - 35 in the United States today. Portions of our inner cities are virtually being held hostage, with citizens in some communities fearful of walking the streets in their own neighborhoods. But where are these guns coming from? We

know in Chicago and in Washington, DC, only through recent rulings were handguns made legal to own in homes. Therefore the perpetrators must be purchasing and utilizing illegal guns to commit their deadly acts. Furthermore the weapons of choice are becoming even more deadlier, with assault weapons such as AK 47's becoming more and more the weapon of choice.

The top source states for D.C.'s crime guns are Virginia (27% of all D.C. crime guns), Maryland (25%), North Carolina (10%), South Carolina (5%) and Georgia (4%). In Virginia, Georgia and South Carolina, private individuals are free to sell firearms at gun shows without conducting background checks on purchasers or keeping any records of sale. Maryland requires background checks on all *handgun*—but not long gun—sales at gun shows. North Carolina requires residents to obtain a permit to purchase a handgun that is valid for a period of five years. This provides some protection for handgun purchases, but does not apply to long guns.

Tragically and ironically when those of us who are victimized, including members of the law enforcement community, attempt to address the issue of gun violence from the standpoint of a public safety issue or a public health crisis, when we say let's close the gun show loopholes, for example, our pleas seem to fall upon deaf ears - it appears as if the leadership of our nation, including President Obama, wishes not to hear us, or act as if the carnage taking place in American cities today does not exist.

But we understand why. We understand that there is a vocal minority, both loud and powerful, that wishes to couch every mention of gun violence as if is an infringement upon the 2nd amendment, as an argument against the right to bear arms, or as another attempt by government to take guns away from citizens. The primary purpose I am here today is to say as loudly and vociferously as I can that no this is not the case and the furthest from the truth imaginable. We know that there are good and honorable Americans throughout this great nation who believe firmly in the right of self defense and to bear arms. But we cannot allow that argument to be used against our better judgment as a smokescreen and forsake the public safety issues of a community, where young people are being murdered on a daily basis and innocent lives lost. We cannot allow people to lose lives and be sacrificed as pawns in some political chess game, or because certain politicians wrap themselves around 2nd amendment issues as a means to gain favors and be reelected.

To that vocal minority, to our elected leaders, and to our fellow citizens, we need to understand that recent Supreme Court decisions in *Heller* and *McDonald* ruled that citizens have a right to protect themselves, their property, and own a handgun in their home - period. Quoting from Justice Alito's opinion in the *McDonald* ruling, "It is important to keep in mind that *Heller*, while striking down a law that prohibited the possession of handguns in the home, recognized that the right to

keep and bear arms is not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purposeWe repeat those assurances here.”

To enact legislation to close gun show loopholes is not an infringement on the right to bear arms; it is not a left or right wing cause; it is not a Republican or a Democratic issue; it is not about one concept or ideology versus another concept or ideology. It is about protecting the lives of Americans who do not needlessly and senselessly need to die, be injured, robbed, or brutalized because we did not do a background check against a murderer, armed robber, or rapist. It is in line with the ruling made by the Supreme Court and it is in the best interests of America and the public safety of its citizens.

Please support as well HR1303 - The Community in Action Neighborhood Defense and Opportunity Bill introduced by Congressman Bobby Rush that directly addresses the issue of gun violence from a public health perspective. And, last but not least, thanks to Abby Spangler, for her leadership and persistence in bringing this cause to the forefront.

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