

The Child You Save May Be Your Own

Parents Who Own a Gun:

- ☒ Unload it and lock it up.
- ☒ Lock and store ammunition separately.
- ☒ Hide keys where children can't find them.

All Parents:

- ☒ Ask if guns are safely stored at places your children visit or play.
- ☒ Talk to your children about guns.
- ☒ Teach young children not to touch guns, and to tell an adult if they find one.

www.kidsandguns.org

Common Sense

ABOUT KIDS AND GUNS



**IT'S EASIER TO CHILD-PROOF YOUR GUN
THAN BULLET-PROOF YOUR CHILD.**



**Lock a gun, save a life.
Call 1-877 SAFE ARMS.**

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Who We Are

A group of owners/non-owners of guns committed to working together to protect America's children from gun deaths and injuries.

Our Mission

To reduce gun deaths and injuries to children and teens by promoting common sense safety measures and personal and community responsibility for preventing unsupervised access to guns.

What We Believe

America's adults share a deeply-felt common interest in protecting children and teens from gun violence.

Adults bear the responsibility for protecting children and teens from the dangers of unsupervised access to guns.

Common sense solutions exist today that can greatly reduce gun-related injuries and deaths:

- Educating the public about risks of unsupervised access to guns by children and teens
- Encouraging safe gun storage practices
- Opening dialogue among gun owners, non-gun owners, parents and children

What We Are Doing

Working with a diverse group of individuals and organizations to disseminate information about common sense solutions for reducing gun-related injuries and deaths to children and teens.

Creating a national media campaign to increase public awareness about this issue.

Acting as a national clearinghouse for information on how Americans can take personal and community responsibility for addressing this issue.



One Bridge Street, Suite 300, Newton, MA 02458

OVERVIEW

Stop Handgun Violence is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization founded in 1995 by a group of businesspeople who were alarmed by the increasing number of gun deaths and injuries in America. Our goal is not to ban guns, but to prevent gun violence by advocating personal responsibility, public awareness, practical legislation, increased manufacturer responsibility, and strict law enforcement. We believe that the key to stopping gun violence is helping people to recognize the magnitude of the problem and participate in the solutions. In Massachusetts, we've already made a real difference. Gun violence is down 53% since 1994. Other states have taken notice, and our gun violence prevention efforts have been a model for the nation.

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ELIZABETH MILES,
PROJECT DIRECTOR

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Public Education:

Since 1995, Stop Handgun Violence has helped increase public awareness about the epidemic of gun violence. SHV has developed several effective media and public education campaigns. For instance, we installed over 1,000 victim tribute billboards around the country. These billboards depicted the faces of children who were killed by handguns. In addition, SHV distributed over 25,000 quality trigger locks to gun owners across the country over the past year. Moreover, we have helped established gun violence prevention curriculums in schools across the state.

Legislative Initiatives:

Stop Handgun Violence was the lead advocate of the GUN CONTROL ACT OF 1998, which became the most comprehensive gun violence prevention law in the country (Chapter 180). The new law imposes a ban on "Saturday Night Specials" (Junk Guns) and certain assault weapons. Furthermore, it mandates safe storage, manufacturing standards, new gun dealer restrictions, training requirements, and stricter licensing procedures.

The New York Times

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NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 1995

\$1 beyond the greater New York metropol...



David L. Ryan/The Boston Globe

Reminders of Dangers of Guns

Nearly the length of a football field, a billboard on the Massachusetts Turnpike in Boston, the largest of 200 around Massachusetts, shows images of 15 children who were killed with guns. The billboard, near Fenway Park, is intended to remind people of the costs of handgun violence.

The Boston Globe

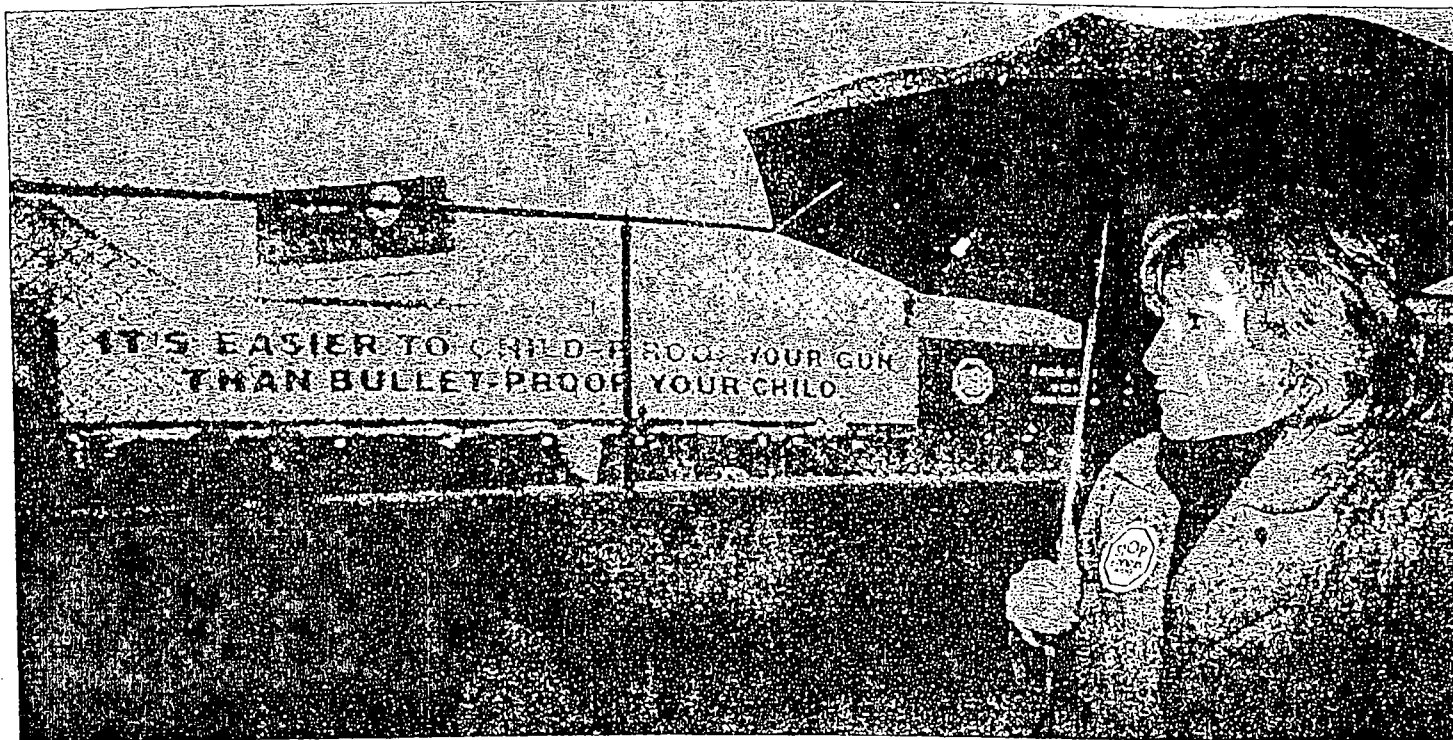
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1997

WALL OF PAIN



AP PHOTO

A worker paused yesterday at the picture of a shooting victim during the unveiling of a new billboard along the Mass. Pike. A national gun-control campaign was announced even as cutbacks threatened a group tracking gun violence. Stories, B2.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / JIM DAVIS

Jeannette Gunther, friend of a family who lost a child in a gun accident, yesterday at the billboard unveiling behind Lansdowne Street.

Gun safety advocates change their message

By Zachary R. Dowdy
GLOBE STAFF

A few years ago, a corps of handgun opponents brought a city jaded by violence face to face with the state's young victims of guns.

That was the thinking in 1995 behind the billboard that handgun opponents posted on the Massachusetts Turnpike, bearing images of children of all races who had been killed and showing that the terror of misused guns doesn't discriminate.

But in a sign of the times, the focus now is on doing something about the avoidable tragedies. The new target is gun owners, manufacturers, and the government who, with safety

devices, can make guns harder for kids to use.

Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino, parents who lost children, and Stop Handgun Violence Inc. yesterday unveiled a new billboard — minus the faces of victims — that urges greater responsibility to prevent gun deaths.

"The reason for the switch is half of all gun injuries and deaths are suicides or accidents — and could be prevented," said John Rosenthal, chairman of Stop Handgun Violence, citing figures from the National Center for Health Statistics.

"Children and young people pay the highest price for unlocked guns," Menino said, flanked by parents of children in Massachusetts who died because of fatal mishaps with guns.

Pamela Goodwin of Lynnfield, whose 2½-year-old son Kevin was accidentally killed in 1996 by a gun, said the campaign may help save another child's life.

"It's important that people understand that we need to start educating people," she said. "This cam-

paign is excellent."

Yesterday's announcement follows the news late last week that Boston is planning to sue gun manufacturers, targeting guns in the courts as a consumer product, a departure from traditional gun-control measures.

Boston's move piggybacks on similar actions in Chicago and New Orleans, cities that are seeking damages from gun manufacturers, distributors, and stores, spurred in part by the success of state lawsuits against the tobacco industry.

Rosenthal said that up to 300 billboards across the state will bear the substance of the message now emblazoned on the 252-by-20-foot Pike billboard in bold green and black: "It's easier to childproof your gun than bulletproof your child. Lock a gun. Save a life."

The billboards will keep that message for three to six months, driving the point home.

The campaign is as much an attempt to persuade gun owners to be careful while storing their guns as a

push for stricter regulation. Rosenthal said a gun is the only consumer product in the country that eludes oversight by the National Consumer Product Safety Commission, while cars and their users are subject to a battery of regulations.

A switch in strategy also coincides with a drop in crime. All major categories of crime have been plummeting in Boston for several years in a row.

While he credited gun opponents with bringing about a 41 percent drop in gun violence in Massachusetts from 1994 to 1996, Rosenthal said much work remains to be done.

"Our goal is to replicate that campaign nationwide, and the biggest potential impact will be childproofing guns or personalizing guns, and manufacturers can do it," he said.

Anthony Flint of the Globe staff contributed to this report.



**IT'S EASIER TO CHILD-PROOF YOUR GUN
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Call 1-877-SAFE-KIDS
www.stop2stopkids.com

Huge billboard has no need for words

By Daniel Vasquez
GLOBE STAFF

Each time Mark Mathieu sees his son Ross smiling down at him from a 252-foot billboard, it makes him cry.

The sign, behind Fenway Park facing the Massachusetts Turnpike, was the backdrop yesterday for a national gun-control campaign aimed at reducing handgun violence — the kind that ended Ross's life at age 12.

The dark-haired Mattapoissett

boy with the round cheeks and the sly grin died last year after playing with a friend and a gun. Now, his huge photograph joins those of nine other young victims, poster children for senseless, gun-related deaths.

Their faces — some happy, others serious — look out over the 200,000 daily commuters who pass beneath the sobering billboard on the turnpike.

"I am one of the suffering parents," said Mathieu, holding back tears as he addressed parents, residents, legislators, and law enforcement officials gathered at the Stop Handgun Violence rally near the sign. "When people say 'I can't imagine how you feel,' you can't."

Founded by local businessman John Rosenthal, Stop Handgun Violence has joined forces with Cease Fire Inc., a Washington-based public education group.

The nonprofit coalition will place billboards and run ads and announcements across the country, and distribute brochures at hospitals and schools.

Boston is the first among six major cities, including Miami and Salt Lake City, targeted by organizers. Boston was selected because of the city's growing reputation as successfully fighting crime and violence.

Boston Police Commissioner Paul Evans and Attorney General Scott Harshbarger were lauded yesterday for the city's dramatic reductions in crime — particularly among young people. In Boston, no one under age 17 has been murdered in two years.

The statistical drop has largely been credited to joint efforts by police, prosecutors, and community leaders. It also mirrors a statewide trend, Rosenthal said; hospital emergency room statistics indicate a 41 percent reduction in gun violence.

The number of faces on the billboard also reflects the drop. The former billboard contained the faces of 15 children, the average number of children who died from gunshots each day nationwide. The new bill-



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/DAVID L. RYAN

Marc Mathieu and nephew Daniel Gushue looked at the new billboard yesterday on which Mathieu's slain son Ross is pictured.

board has 10 faces.

At yesterday's rally, Evans warned against complacency. He said the drop in violence has been positive, "but we can only go one way — up — and we don't want to see that."

Still, neither the rhetoric nor the statistics carried the same impact as the innocent faces on the billboard.

During his speech, Mathieu described how his son and a friend toyed with a gun they found at the friend's home. The boys loaded the gun, then pulled the ammunition clip out, thinking the gun was unloaded.

"Hopefully," Mathieu said, "people will look up at my son's face and think twice" about handgun safety.

Terri Thompson drove 17 hours from Elkhart, Ind., for the rally. Her 13-year-old son, Joey, was shot and killed accidentally four years ago by a friend. His photo graced the old billboard.

"When this happened to me, I felt completely alone. Today, there's a lot more support out there. I hope, like [the Mothers Against Drunk Driving] campaign, this will someday make a change."

The Boston Globe

TUESDAY, JUNE 15, 1999

Gore urges raising age for owning guns

By Jua Nyla Hutcheson
REUTERS

NEW ORLEANS - Vice President Al Gore yesterday urged Congress to raise the legal age for handgun possession, saying Americans between the ages of 18 and 20 make up only 4 percent of the population but commit 24 percent of gun murders in the country.

"Incredibly, while these 18- to 20-year-olds cannot legally buy a beer, cannot purchase a bottle of wine, cannot order a drink in a bar, they can walk into any gun shop, pawn shop, or gun show in America and buy a handgun," Gore told the nation's mayors.

Addressing the US Conference of Mayors, Gore called on Congress to raise the legal age for handgun possession from 18 to 21 and require child-safety locks on guns and background checks on those who buy guns at gun shows.

"I saw a billboard in one of your cities the other day that said it's easier to child-proof a gun than to bullet-proof a child, and that's so true," he said.

He said those who oppose closing the loophole that does not require

background checks on gun buyers at gun shows are "going against common sense. They're going against our children and our families."

"Will we let the NRA call the shots in Washington or will we cross party lines to make our children safer?" Gore asked.

At the conference Gore released a new study by the departments of Justice and Treasury that showed that people between 18 and 20 years old commit 24 percent of the murders involving guns, with 18-year-old youths committing 35 percent more gun murders than 21-year-olds.

Crime guns recovered from 18- to 20-year-olds are mostly handguns, particularly semiautomatic pistols. That age group also leads all others in using guns in nonlethal crimes, including assault, rape, and robbery, the report said.

Gore called on the House of Representatives, expected to debate gun measures this week, to pass a bipartisan, common sense measure to "keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals and others who should not have access to them."

New gun law under fire

Registration regulations hailed, but legal battle anticipated

By JULES CRITTENDEN

Starting today, the crime you commit with a gun may earn you more prison time.

But if you're a law-abiding citizen, the gun you keep in your closet had better be locked, or you may face a fine or jail time, too.

And if you have a permit to own or carry a rifle, shotgun or pistol in Massachusetts, you'll need a new one soon — and you'll have to bring a photo, your fingerprints and \$25 with you when you get it.

The sweeping Gun Control Act of 1998, which takes effect today, is being hailed by anti-gun activists, who say it could be a model for the rest of the nation.

But it is being slammed by gun dealers and enthusiasts, who promise that legal challenges are coming soon.

"It is probably the most comprehensive gun control law in the nation," said John Rosenthal, chairman of Stop Handgun Violence. "If it becomes a model for the other states, I think it will go a long way to reducing the nation's 36,000 gun deaths a year to a mere fraction."

Opponents say the law will only punish law-abiding citizens.

"It's a scary law, because it strikes me that it wasn't very well thought out," countered Rob Meltzer, a Framingham lawyer who represents gun makers and writes on Second Amendment freedoms.

"It penalizes the wrong people. It's a feel-good law. They seem to think that banning guns will end crime," he said.

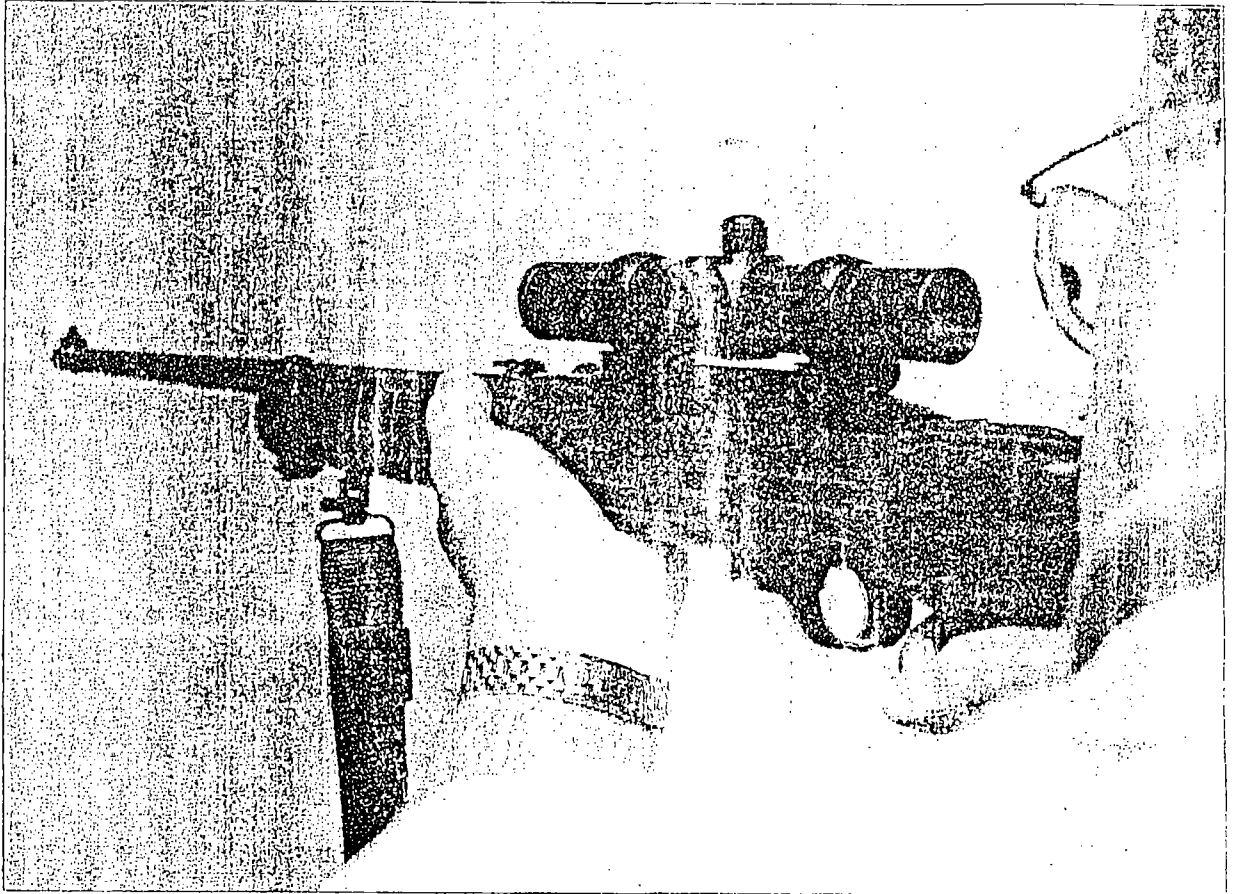
Reefed-up penalties for crimes involving guns have been the least controversial part of the law. All serious drug offenders and violent criminals — including people convicted of violent misdemeanors — will be banned from ever owning a gun and face mandatory sentences of three to 15 years if they are caught with guns.

People who use guns to commit crimes will receive mandatory sentences of five to 20 years. Supporters say similar kinds of laws already have given police the power to target violent criminals.

But a series of new rules on permits and gun storage have angered gun owners, who say they already are under some of the strictest rules in the nation.

All firearm identification cards — once issued for life, allowing the holder to own rifles and shotguns — will have to be renewed every four years with a photograph, fingerprints and a \$25 fee.

New licensees will have to show proof of gun safety training, and all licensees may be required to show



SIGN IN: The owner of this Ruger 18/22 target rifle had better be prepared to re-register with the state under a new law that takes effect today.

'It seems logical to have at least as much oversight in issuing gun licenses as car licenses.'

JOHN ROSENTHAL, CHAIRMAN OF STOP HANDGUN VIOLENCE

a clean bill of mental health.

A new class of guns — "large-capacity" weapons that are able to carry more than 10 rounds — is created, and different licenses to carry are required for large-capacity handguns or small-capacity handguns.

People who don't lock and store their weapons safely may face fines of \$500 to \$10,000, with jail time of one to 10 years, depending on the class of weapon and whether there are children in the house.

"We consider driving a privilege, a renewable privilege," said Rosenthal. "Why should a gun, which is designed to kill, not be subject to the same restrictions? It seems logical to have at least as much oversight in issuing gun licenses as car licenses."

"The gun lobby is going ballistic because for once the gun is being treated as a consumer product," Rosenthal said.

"This new bill requires individual responsibility. If you want to get a gun, you have to have training, licensing and registration. There is nothing monumentally onerous about this bill."

But Meltzer said criminals aren't going to pay any attention to the law.

"What becomes lost in the shuffle

is that a gun is a constitutionally protected consumer product. When you buy a steak knife, you're not fingerprinted and photographed. This is an invasion of privacy," Meltzer said.

He added that he is concerned that the provisions on safe storage may lead to abuse by police and prosecutors.

The law places new requirements on dealers to ensure that a permit is valid, and bans home gun dealerships.

It also requires gun makers to include such high-tech safety measures as trigger locks that only open for the owner, once those are developed.

Meltzer said he believes the law's wording could leave manufacturers liable for damages, if experts can be found to convince a jury that satisfactory technology exists.

He said he expects legal challenges to the gun control law soon.

"It's going to come from manufacturers and dealers," Meltzer said.

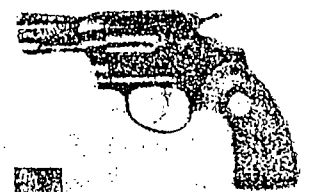
"We'll see a constitutional challenge on what homeowners have to do with their guns," he continued. "If we're going to have a law that says you have to lock up your potentially dangerous consumer products, why stop with guns?"

'It's a feel-good law. They seem to think that banning guns will end crime.'

LAWYER ROB MELTZER, WHO REPRESENTS GUN MANUFACTURERS

Armed in the Bay State

About 20 percent of the roughly 6,016,425 residents of Mass. have some kind of firearm permit.



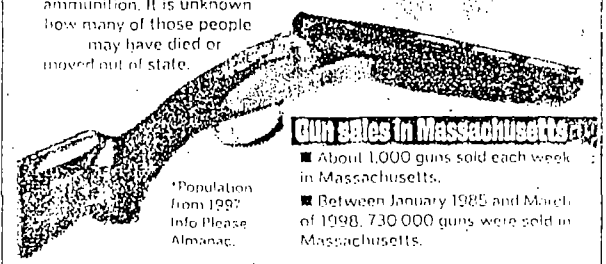
Licensed residents

1.2 million

people have firearms identification cards that allow them to own rifles and shotguns and buy ammunition. It is unknown how many of those people may have died or moved out of state.

204,000

people in Massachusetts currently have licenses to carry a handgun (pistol permits).



Gun sales in Massachusetts

■ About 1,000 guns sold each week in Massachusetts.

■ Between January 1985 and March of 1998, 730,000 guns were sold in Massachusetts.

STATE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Stop Handgun Violence

One Bridge Street, Newton, MA 02458
Telephone: 617/243-8174
Facsimile: 617/965-7308

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 20, 1998

Contact: Jennifer Fraser 617/243-8174
John Rosenthal 617/965-2200 x150

GUN CONTROL ACT OF 1998 GOES INTO EFFECT WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21

Stop Handgun Violence is pleased to announce that the most comprehensive gun violence prevention legislation in the country goes into effect in Massachusetts on Wednesday, October 21, 1998. "This bill requires individual, manufacturer, and civic responsibility and will further prevent gun violence in Massachusetts," according to John Rosenthal, Chairman of Stop Handgun Violence. In addition to codifying the federal ban on assault weapons, this bill also bans Saturday Night Specials and requires renewable gun licensing. In short, this new law will help prevent children from gaining access to guns by making gun owners responsible for safe storage of their inherently dangerous weapons and provides for stiff criminal penalties for negligent storage in the commission of a crime. This bill does not punish lawful gun owners, it is legislation that focuses on gun safety, gun owner, manufacturer and dealer responsibility without banning most guns, other than assault weapons and cheaply made Saturday Night Specials.

This legislation includes several important provisions:

- Codifies the federal assault weapons ban. This ban prohibits possession or sale of assault weapons or high capacity ammunition magazines manufactured after September 13, 1994, the date the Federal Assault Weapons Ban went into effect.
- Requires all new gun license applicants to pass a gun safety course.
- Holds gun owners responsible for safe storage of guns and provides graduated penalties for negligent storage depending on the type of gun.
- Increased penalties for gun related crimes including use of a gun in the commission of felony, illegal gun trafficking, illegal sale to a minor and felon in possession.
- Creates a new category of high capacity weapons, defined as semi-automatic weapons which can hold more than ten rounds, or which can accept a detachable magazine which holds more than ten rounds.
- Creates a new licensing structure for all guns as follows:
 1. FID card: for all non-large capacity rifles and shotguns.

2. Class B License to Carry: for all non-large capacity handguns, and all large capacity rifles and shotguns.
 3. Class A License to Carry: for all handguns, rifles, and shotguns.
 4. The FID card would continue to be issued on a non-discretionary basis to any eligible individual, while both the Class A and Class B License to Carry would be issued by local police chiefs based on suitability.
 5. FID Cards and License to Carry cards will both be renewable every four years. Fees for licensing and renewal will be raised to \$25 to cover the cost of a criminal background check. Under current law the FID lasts for life and the License to Carry is renewable every five years. FID cards will now require a photo and a fingerprint.
 6. New factors that would disqualify an applicant for an FID or LTC include a conviction for a violence misdemeanor or the existence of an outstanding arrest warrant. Violence criminals and those convicted of drug or gun trafficking will be prohibited from obtaining a gun license for life.
 7. All current FID cards will expire on the cardholders date of birth between July 1999 and June of the year 2000. Current LTC's will be valid until their natural expiration date.
- Establishes a Firearms Recordkeeping Trust Fund that will receive one half of all licensing fees for use in conducting background checks and improving the state's firearms recordkeeping system. Cities and Towns will retain the other 50% of all fee revenues.
 - Prohibits the possession or sale of sawed off shotguns and of so called gadget guns.
 - Prohibits the future sale of junk guns otherwise known as Saturday Night Specials by codifying the Attorney General's consumer protection regulations. Currently owned guns are exempt.
 - Requires manufacturers to include safety devices with the sale of guns in Massachusetts.
 - Requires that gun dealers operate out of bona fide stores in commercial zones only.
 - Prohibits mail order gun sales.
 - Establishes penalties for possession of a weapon while intoxicated.

John Rosenthal, further states, "Our goal is to prevent gun injuries and deaths. This legislation along with other statewide initiatives which have already helped reduce gun violence in Massachusetts by 41% in just three years, is model legislation and if replicated nationwide could substantially reduce the 36,000 gun deaths and 400,000 injuries each year. We worked very hard to pass this gun violence prevention bill which had the support of law enforcement, legislators, victims and gun owners."

We are very proud to have had a hand in the passage of this major piece of gun violence prevention legislation. It is very encouraging when concerned individuals join forces with law enforcement, victims, gun owners and legislators to pass life saving laws in spite of active opposition from GOAL and the NRA.

#

THE BOSTON MODEL TO PREVENT YOUTH VIOLENCE A SUMMARY OF PARTNERSHIPS AND INITIATIVES

"The foundation of Boston's approach has been the building of coalitions and partnerships among police, prosecutors, correction officials, youth and social service personnel, judges, health professionals, parents and the young people of Boston...I am impressed with their efforts."

Attorney General Janet Reno in the forward to One City's Success Story, the Justice Department's booklet on the Boston Strategy, September 3, 1996.

Operation Night Light:

A partnership between police and probation officers that provides the courts with tools to enforce the terms of probation. For example, nightly visits to the homes of young people ensure they are not on the streets past their curfew.

Youth Violence Strike Force:

A multi-agency task force partly made up of Boston Police Officers, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) agents, Department of Youth Services correction officers. The task force works to evaluate the city's violence prevention initiatives, form strategies, and report their progress to the Massachusetts Attorney General, and the Suffolk county District Attorney. Extensive research by Harvard's Kennedy School, supplies the task force with data on the flow of firearms, patterns of offenders, and identified high crime areas.

Operation Cease Fire:

A strategy of systematic, focused intervention, using knowledge developed by a wide circle of collaborators, to deter youth violence. Operation Cease-Fire brings together essential public safety, criminal justice, and community leaders to meet with repeat offenders and gang leaders to demand compliance. The youth offenders and suspected gang members are informed that if any criminal activity continues, there will be a concentrated "Zero Tolerance" approach implemented and convictions will be made.

The Boston Gun Project:

A strategy that aims at shutting down illegal gun dealers, by tracing gun serial numbers and severely punishing those who provide guns to gang members and other young people.

Community Mobilization Project:

A strategy which increases community policing in areas of the city, that are designated high-crime areas. Community police officers work with youth, parents, clergy, business owners, and educators to build trust, reduce fear, and create a plan to improve the quality of the neighborhood.

Youth Service Providers Network:

A partnership between Boston Police Departments and Boys and Girls Clubs, to offer identified at-risk young people, the appropriate professional services and after-school programs.

Summer of Opportunity:

A collaboration between the Youth Violence Strike Force, John Hancock Financial Services, and Northeastern University, which provides a 38 week job training and life skills program to youths at risk of gang involvement.

The Child Witness to Violence Project:

A partnership of district police officers, and pediatricians, emergency room staff, and child psychiatrist at the Boston Medical Center. The police officers are trained to assess the impact of trauma on the child and family and re-stabilize the family to support the child, after a violent incident occurs. In addition, officers refer children to the appropriate health services.

Alternatives to Incarceration Network

A collaboration between courts and correctional services, which provides rehabilitation services and strictly monitors youth, as an alternative to incarcerated. Through the network, clients have access to substance abuse counseling, educational programs, individual and group counseling, job skills training, job placement, residential placement, life skills counseling, and violence prevention programs.

A tragic opportunity to limit access to guns

Newton group says
Littleton should
provide political
impetus for change

By Marie Blanchard
TAB STAFF WRITER

In the aftermath of the Columbine tragedy, John Rosenthal has found himself to be the political man of the hour in Massachusetts.

"It's a dubious honor," Rosenthal said Monday from his organization's Stop Handgun Violence office in Nonantum.

In the past week, Rosenthal, who is the co-founder of the nonprofit group Stop Handgun Violence, has found himself bombarded with phone calls from local newspapers and television stations looking for information, ideas and, of course, quotes. The spotlight found Rosenthal in the wake of last week's tragic shooting in Littleton, Colo., where 14 students and one teacher died after two students allegedly went on a deadly shooting rampage in a suburban high school before finally turning the guns on themselves.

But Rosenthal is taking all the attention in stride, saying it is long overdue and that he hopes that the tragedy will finally provide the political impetus for Congress to pass stringent regulations on the sale and production of guns in the country.

Stop Handgun Violence is a gun-safety advocacy group that was first started in 1995 after Rosenthal saw a statistic on the number of children killed daily by guns in the United States.

"Fourteen children are killed a day by handguns," Rosenthal said. "Those numbers add up. That's over 5,000 children under 19 each year. It's the

equivalent of a classroom in Columbine High School, or Jonesboro, or any 'boro,' every day."

When Rosenthal first learned that so many children died annually from gunshot wounds, he teamed up with the late Michael Kennedy to create Stop Handgun Violence in the hope of raising "gun violence awareness." Last year, Rosenthal's organization put up the "largest billboard in America," off the Massachusetts Turnpike, a board 252 feet by 20 feet with the pictures of young children killed in gun-related accidents and the caption "The cost of handguns keeps going up."

Now, Rosenthal argues the Columbine High School massacre should provide the political ammunition to make drastic changes in the regulation of guns in the United States and that he feels it is ridiculous that guns are not regulated as much as any other goods available for purchase.

"Guns are the only product in the country that are not regulated by the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission," Rosenthal said, adding that even teddy bears and other toys are regulated by federal and state agencies.

Specifically, Stop Handgun Violence wants to pass a federal law similar to the gun control bill Massachusetts passed in July, which would significantly regulate the purchase and kinds of guns available in the country.

The group, which does not advocate the complete prohibition of guns, is for the banning of assault weapons, requiring that gun owners "safely" store their weapons and keep safety-locks on guns to prevent accidents. The group is against all sales of guns from unregistered stores and by mail order and favors making sure all purchasers of guns are licensed, trained and registered.

All are measures that were passed last year in Massachusetts.



John Rosenthal is the chairman of the Newton-based organization Stop Handgun Violence.

STAFF PHOTO BY DARREN MCCOLLISTER

The 41 percent reduction in gun injuries in the state over the last few years can be attributed to stronger gun control legislation in the commonwealth, and this number alone should make the state a model for federal change, Rosenthal said.

Stop Handgun Violence worked with Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy to draft a bill that would regulate guns on a federal level. The legislation was introduced to Congress in March and is still pending.

But unlike many other staunch supporters of stricter gun control laws for the country, Rosenthal actually owns a gun which he keeps in his home.

Yet he doesn't view his gun ownership as hypocritical, saying he uses his guns for hunting, not for protection.

And he added that he wouldn't keep guns in his home if he had children.

"I presently see no legitimate need for handguns," Rosenthal said. "But I don't think we should be calling a ban on handguns, just that we need to treat access to these weapons as a privilege, not as a right."

To be fair, guns laws in the United States have been far less stringent in the past, yet school-wide shootings like the one at Columbine High were unheard of, Rosenthal said.

And he acknowledges that the Columbine tragedy cannot entirely be blamed on easy access to guns, though he pointed out that one of the suspects did buy one of the guns involved in last week's massacre legally, on his 18th birthday.

"You can't drink at 18, but you can buy a gun?" Rosenthal said. "That's ludicrous."

What worries Rosenthal most, however, is the thought that the current spotlight on the gun control movement may fade away in a few weeks, moving the issue of stricter gun regulations out of the headlines and away from legislator's agendas ... until the next Columbine tragedy occurs.

"We have a tremendous opportunity," Rosenthal said. "It's too late now for those 14 kids who woke up this morning and will be dead by tonight. Every death is too much. But we now have the opportunity to prevent even more violence and we need to seize that."

Gun-safety program is father's crusade

After his son's death,
he promotes gun-locks

By Paul Kandarian
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

MATTAPOISETT — Marc Mathieu always believed that something good can come out of something bad. He just never believed that something so devastatingly bad would happen to him.

On May 15, 1996, Mathieu's life changed forever when his 12-year-old son, Ross, was accidentally killed by a friend, as the two boys played with a handgun they thought was unloaded. Ever since, Mathieu has been promoting a gun-lock program to ensure that no one else will have to endure what he has.

"The boys were playing outside, when Ross's friend said he wanted to show him something in the house," Mathieu said. "It was a .25 Beretta the father had on a closet shelf."

The boys unloaded the clip, Mathieu said, figuring the gun was safe, not knowing a round remained in the chamber. The gun in the friend's hand fired from six inches away, the bullet entering Ross just under the left eye and exiting the back of his neck. He died instantly, his father said.

A \$12 lock around the gun's trigger would have rendered it impossible to fire, meaning Ross Mathieu would still be here today, his father said, still playing Little League ball, still making his friends laugh, still filling up his father's life.

Mark Mathieu decided to turn his worst nightmare into a life-saving crusade.

Mathieu, production manager for RiverView Marketing Consultants Inc. in Mattapoisett, and his boss, company president William L. Blackwell, have begun what they say is a national model for gun-lock programs, run in conjunction with Stop Handgun Violence Inc., a group founded in 1995 by Boston businessman John Rosenthal, which was co-chaired by the late Michael Kennedy.

The joint effort has resulted in more than 7,000 gun locks being distributed to police departments across the country, from New Bedford, where Mathieu lives, to communities in Oregon and Florida. Police make the locks, which secure the trigger and make the weapon impossible to fire, available to gun owners in their communities. Mathieu said 5,000 are about to be given away by the state of New Hampshire to various police departments there.

Blackwell bought the first 250 gun locks, Mathieu said, and has been an active supporter of his efforts since.

"I'm out there raising money for more gun locks and showing people how to do their own fund-raisers, all on [Blackwell's] nickel," Mathieu said. "He continues to pay my salary while I'm doing this. I couldn't do any of it without him."

"This program is as important to me as it is to Marc," Blackwell said. "I knew Ross very well. We went sailing together; I've got pictures of him all over the place. He was just a great, great kid. This program is so vital because I don't want anyone to go through that pain again," he said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control's National Center for Health Statistics, 15 children under 19 were killed by handguns every day from 1994 to 1997. But that number is now down to 10, according to Rosenthal, who said the newest CDC figures were released last fall.

"I truly believe that the gun-lock program has had a lot to do with that," Rosenthal said.

Wareham Police Detective Preston C. Urquhart is a friend of Mathieu's and a friend of the father of Kyle St. Jacques, an 18-year-old Wareham youth who was killed in an accidental shooting in January. Urquhart is a strong proponent of the gun-lock program.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / TOM LANDERS

Mark Mathieu (left) and William Blackwell, advocates of gun safety, displayed a poster of children killed by guns, and the locks that could help prevent such deaths.

"There is no downside to the program, none," he said. "We promote it heavily on local cable and the response has been tremendous. We've given away 200 and have six more cases on order. We have a waiting list for the things."

Letters about the gun-lock program are being sent to every police chief in the country, as well as to the heads of emergency rooms in hospitals nationwide, people who have firsthand knowledge of the deadly effects of gun accidents.

The National Rifle Association, however, says a locked gun doesn't provide the home protection many people buy guns for.

"Trigger locks are not right for every storage situation," said NRA spokesman James Manown. "A married couple with three young children in the suburbs has very different considerations than a single woman living alone in an urban area."

Mathieu disagrees.

"This is a common sense issue, or it should be," Mathieu said. "If you're in the house, fine, unlock the gun if you're going to be around because in that sense, you are the gun lock. If you're not, lock it up. Most accidents with children happen when the parents aren't around."

Mathieu said he is all for gun safety education — his son had taken such a course — but he said that gun locks provided an extra, foolproof measure of protection that education cannot.

"I always stress, I am not pro-gun, I am not anti-

gun," he said. "People have a right to own guns and I support that right. But I have a right to know those guns are secure if my kids are around them. This is about saving lives, it's that simple."

There are reminders of Mathieu's son everywhere in his life, from the gun locks he promotes to the photos on his desk at work. And there is that looming reminder to all on the Mass. Pike in Boston — Ross's picture is on the Stop Handgun Violence billboard.

Mathieu said his 17-year-old daughter didn't want to see the billboard for a long time, but finally, last December, she changed her mind.

"She said, 'Dad, it's so big ... don't people get it when they see this, don't they get it?'" Mathieu said.

Mathieu says that if he was not so involved in the gun-lock program, the sorrow over his son's death might have destroyed him.

"Every day, I cry for my son, every day I think of him," he said. "I go to his grave all the time. If I feel bad, I talk to him and I feel better."

"We were always together, always," he said about Ross. "People knew, you got me, you got Ross. He was like a mini-adult, he knew when to pipe up, when to quiet down, he was a real together, happy kid."

"I taught my son he could make a difference in life," Mathieu said. "In this way, he is."

For more information on the gun lock program, call Marc Mathieu at (508) 755-6111.

Boston Herald 4-22-99

Anti-gun group calls NRA society's scourge

By MARK MUELLER

Calling the National Rifle Association a scourge on society and members of Congress cowards, an anti-gun group yesterday angrily challenged Americans to demand tighter restrictions on firearms in the wake of Tuesday's high school massacre in Colorado.

"This will happen again and again as long as guns are accessible to kids and go virtually unregulated nationwide," said John Rosenthal, co-founder of Newton-based Stop Handgun Violence. While authorities in Littleton, Colo., have not yet said where the two suspects in the Columbine High School shooting obtained their arsenal, Rosenthal said it's all too easy to guess: a friend, a parent, a gun dealer, perhaps the Internet. A common theme in each of the shootings at schools, Rosenthal said, was easy access to guns.

"If you want to blame someone about the schoolyard shootings, blame the National Rifle Association for their intimidation of Congress and the fear they're selling to the American public," Rosenthal boomed. "If you want to blame somebody, blame the U.S. Con-

'... Blame the National Rifle Association for their intimidation of Congress and the fear they're selling to the American public.'

**JOHN ROSENTHAL,
STOP HANDGUN VIOLENCE**

gress and their inability to pass gun control laws."

Longtime gun control advocate Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) also blasted the NRA for blocking attempts to curb handgun abuses and even pushing bills allowing convicted felons to buy concealed weapons.

"America does more today to regulate the safety of toy guns than real guns and that is a national disgrace," said Kennedy. "Why? Because of the power of the NRA."

Saying guns are responsible for 34,000 deaths and 300,000 injuries each year, Rosenthal urged other states and the federal government to adopt laws similar to those passed last year in Massachusetts, which he hailed as a model for the nation.

The Bay State laws, like those in other states, require gun owners to obtain licenses and to register their weapons. But Massachusetts goes further, requiring new gun owners to undergo training and to keep their weapons locked up. Massachusetts also is the only state to ban "Saturday Night Specials," a class of low-cost handguns often used in crimes.

Adding emotional depth to his pitch, Rosenthal was joined yesterday by Marc Mathieu, 50, of New Bedford, whose 12-year-old son was killed during horseplay with a handgun owned by a friend's father three years ago.

"Ross was an all-American boy," Mathieu said, his eyes glistening. "I kissed him goodbye in the morning and by afternoon he was gone. It's a child's right in America to be safe. Help us. Call your legislators. Change comes from mass outrage."

Mass. gun maker targets dealers with ethics pledge

By TOM MASHBERG

A move by Springfield-based Smith & Wesson Co. to require its registered firearms dealers to sign an ethics pledge regarding their handgun sales was met positively yesterday by people on both sides of the firearms-control debate.

"We're asking our dealers to tell us not only that they are meeting the requirements to sell lawfully, but that they are fully cognizant of their requirements under the law and that they are telling us in writing that they are cognizant of that," said Ken Jorgensen, director of publicity and media relations for Smith & Wesson, the nation's largest handgun maker.

Among other things, Jorgensen said, the code requires certain wholesalers to obey all firearms laws; to sell only Smith & Wesson guns with safety locks; and to

monitor buyers to avoid illegal purchases by "straw buyers."

The company also vowed it would stop doing business with those wholesalers who run afoul of the law or have failed to sign the pledge within 30 days.

However, retailers do not need to sign the pledge to sell Smith & Wesson handguns; the firm generally distributes to wholesalers, who sell to retail stores.

John Rosenthal, founder and chairman of Boston-based Stop Handgun Violence, said, "It can't hurt when the largest gun manufacturer in the country takes any responsibility for their weapon after it leaves their plant. It's a public relations maneuver to help diminish the impact of lawsuits coming up against gun makers. It is indicative of the gun makers' realizing they have a responsibility beyond making the weapon."

The question of whether a gun maker

has any liability for the results of gun use has been raised in recent years in several lawsuits around the country. Smith & Wesson, which in 1997 became the first major manufacturer to ship its weapons with trigger locks, has been cleared in lawsuits so far.

Jorgensen said more than three-quarters of Smith & Wesson's 3,500 registered dealers in the United States have signed the agreement since it was mailed out in mid-July. About 200 such dealers do business in Massachusetts.

Walter Carr, co-owner of Carr's Sporting Goods in Taunton, said he expected to sign the letter as one of Smith & Wesson's stocking dealers. "I can understand them doing that," he said. "One of the reasons is legal liability."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

NRA eagle mascot assailed by gun foes

By J. M. LAWRENCE

He's a bird with a happy face, but gun-control advocates contend the mascot for the state's gun safety week that ends today is "Joe Camel with feathers."

Developed by the National Rifle Association, "Eddy Eagle" is used in curriculum supplied to 50 public and private Massachusetts schools, according to NRA records.

"It's nothing more than a marketing scheme to reach a new generation," said John Rosenthal, director of Stop Handgun Violence whose group once plastered billboards with the faces of kids killed by handguns.

Last year, Gov. Paul Cellucci proclaimed the first week in October each year as "Eddy Eagle Gun Safety Week."

Eddy Eagle advocates, including a Lancaster police officer who teaches the program to elementary students and Brownie troops, contend their bird is no player in the gun control debate.

"It's not pro gun or anti gun," said Patrolman Ron Knoll.

"There is never a gun used in the program. It's all about gun avoidance."

Knoll also is a board member of the Gun Owners Action League, the state lobbying wing of the NRA.

According to Knoll, GOAL helped the Lancaster Police Department

'It's nothing more than a marketing scheme to reach a new generation.'

**JOHN ROSENTHAL,
STOP HANDGUN VIOLENCE**

purchase an Eddy Eagle costume for use in the program, which is offered free to area schools.

In a 45-minute session, Knoll tells elementary schoolkids they should never touch a gun and should notify an adult if they find a weapon, he said.

One girl told Knoll of a loaded revolver her father kept in his room. The patrolman then notified the man to store the gun in a safer place, he said.

Rosenthal accused the state of helping the NRA create a new market for guns.

"It's nothing more than a ruse to enlist young gun owners to a reprehensible gun lobby," Rosenthal said.

Knoll maintained the program does not encourage kids to become gun owners.

"If they get older and want to join the NRA, that's up to them," he said.

Boston Herald p. 10 Saturday, October 9, 1999

2.6M U.S. gunslingers are 11 to 18 years old, according to survey

By J. M. LAWRENCE

As many as 2.6 million American kids carried a gun last year, claims a new survey released yesterday as scores of mayors and police chiefs gathered in Washington to lobby Congress for tougher gun laws.

"It's incredible," said gun control advocate John Rosenthal of the Newton-based Stop Hand-gun Violence, "but somehow not surprising when you consider toy guns and teddy bears are more regulated than real guns."

The startling number of child gunslingers was extrapolated from a Washington based group's 12th annual PRIDE National Survey of Student Drug Use and Violence.

Students were three times more likely to carry their guns while outside of school than in the classroom, the survey found.

Using questions posed to 138,079 students ages 11 to 18 in 28 states, the survey found:

- 10.3 percent carried a gun outside of school. (PRIDE applied that percentage to the 25.6 million school children in the same age group nationwide to arrive at the figure of 2.6 million gun carriers.)

- about half of the gun-owning students admitted to carrying a gun at school on two or

more occasions.

- 25 percent said they have been afraid another student would hurt them at school.

- 3.3 percent said another student has hurt them with a gun, knife or club.

- 6 percent admitted threatening other students with a gun or weapon.

- 40 percent admitted they have bullied another student with threats of hitting, slapping or kicking.

The statistics are new fodder for the gun control debates dominating Capitol Hill ever since the April 20 massacre of students at Columbine High School.

Denver Mayor Wellington Webb, new president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, leads a group of mayors and police chiefs to the steps of the Capitol today to rally for more gun regulation. The National Rifle Association has effectively scuttled efforts to lengthen the waiting period beyond a single day in most cases.

Guns now kill 94 Americans every day, including 13 children, said Rosenthal, who emphasized that he himself is a gun owner.

"Instead of arming the youth of America as we have allowed, we should restrict access to guns like we restrict access to cars," he said.

The Boston Globe

COOL COMFORT

Today: Sunny, chilly, 55
 Tomorrow: Increasing clouds, 55
 High tide: 7:19 a.m., 7:32 p.m.
 Full report: Page B9

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 1999

Gun dealers sell at home despite ban

By Meg Vaillancourt
 GLOBE STAFF

Hundreds of gun dealers in Massachusetts continue to sell firearms from their homes, state officials said yesterday, despite a ban on home gun sales that went into effect Sept. 1.

And a new seven-member state Gun Advisory Board, which was charged with recommending technical revisions needed to implement Massachusetts' toughest-in-the-nation gun-control laws, has proposed several changes that advocates say would undermine the law — including a provision rescinding the ban on home gun sales.

"Selling Avon out of your home is one thing, but selling guns in a residential neighborhood is quite another," said John Rosenthal, a Newton developer and head of Stop Handgun Violence, a statewide organization that led the push for the 1998 gun-control law. "This is a dangerous step backward, and I'm sure

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FRONT PAGE STORY

THE BOSTON GLOBE

OCTOBER 19, 1999

*We want gun dealers in
established shops and out of
residential neighborhoods, and the
law clearly states that.'*

SENATOR CHERYL A. JACQUES

Gun dealers sell at home after ban

■ GUNS

Continued from Page A1

Governor Cellucci, who supported the law, doesn't want to weaken it now."

The bill, signed into law in 1998, states that licensed firearms dealers "shall maintain a permanent place of business that is not a residence or dwelling" where they can sell their guns.

According to state officials, there are roughly 300 licensed gun dealers in Massachusetts — the vast majority of whom operate out of their homes.

State officials confirmed yesterday that because of confusion about the Legislature's intent, the ban is not being enforced.

The law "may look clear to some people," said Lee Police Chief Ronald Glidden, chairman of the state gun advisory board. "But I think there's a big difference between someone who is selling guns as a hobby from their kitchen table, and someone who is operating a legitimate business at the same residential address, but separate from their dwelling."

Under a proposed revision endorsed by the advisory board, licensed home-based gun dealers could continue to sell guns as long as they met local zoning codes and the home "has a separate entrance door ... and the business location is separate and set apart from the living area of the residence."

But lawmakers who voted for the gun-control measure say their intent was clear: Home-based gun sales are supposed to be shut down.

"This is outrageous," said state Senator Cheryl A. Jacques, a Needham Democrat who co-sponsored the law. "It flies in the face of the Legislature's intent and the public's will. People should be reassured that guns are not being sold in their neighbors' homes and garages. We want gun dealers in established shops and out of residential neighborhoods, and the law clearly states that. Adding a second door doesn't change that."

Gun-control advocates also object to a second recommendation made by the gun advisory board that would make it easier for gun manufacturers to get approval for the sale of newer, cheaper, and possibly inferior, guns.

The current law requires

manufacturers to comply with strict first-in-the-nation consumer protection standards outlined in the law. However, the measure did not specify who would certify the guns meet those standards.

Under a proposal recently endorsed by the gun advisory board, manufacturers could simply file an affidavit stating that they comply with those standards. But gun-control advocates, citing a similar requirement in California, argue that manufacturers should have to pay for tests run by independent labs certifying that their weapons comply with the state's safety standards.

"The idea that we would just take gun manufacturers word for it is very frightening," Jacques said. "Without any independent tests, the law lacks accountability."

Nonetheless, some lawmakers appear open to significant revisions in the state law, including state Representative Timothy J. Toomey Jr. of Cambridge, House chairman of the Legislature's Public Safety Committee, an aide to Toomey said last night.

The gun advisory board, appointed by Governor Paul Cellucci, was set up under the law to recommend technical revisions to Public Safety Secretary Jane Perlov.

However, gun-control proponents say the advisory board is trying to make an end run around the Legislature by recommending drastic changes to the law, rather than focusing only on its proper implementation. "Any significant change in the law like what they're discussing would have to come from amendments passed by the Legislature," Jacques said. "Not an advisory committee appointed by the governor."

Board members include representatives of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, and an official from the Gun Owners Action League.

A spokesman for Perlov said she is "reviewing" the committee's recommendations, but stressed they are "advisory" opinions. Perlov has no timetable for reaching a decision, officials said. The advisory board's next public meeting is slated for Friday.

If we took on big tobacco, we can deal with the gun lobby

DAVID NYHAN

Those ready to surrender on gun control are missing the point. It was never going to happen from the top down. The National Rifle Association has a stranglehold on the Republican Congress. But the pressure for reform, like lava from a volcanic fissure, is irresistible from the bottom up.

In dozens of different ways, like molten lava oozing through wrinkles of the earth's crust, the societal urge to limit the access to deadly weapons emerges gradually, fitfully, slowly, but with inexorable thrust.

If modern American society can do what it has done to rein in the catastrophic damage caused by the lure of tobacco, similar restraints can be imposed on firearms.

The tobacco model is apt. The human lust for nicotine is one of physiology's grand conundrums. That humans crave this drug so strongly, despite the destruction wrought by its delivery system — smoke — is an established behavior pattern, documented physically and psychologically. No one can deny that the lure of the gun is another primordial urge. Having at hand a concealable weapon that can bring instant death to an enemy or a tormentor at the flick of a finger is terribly alluring to those in fear.

And our media, both information and entertainment branches, are fixated on creating fear. Fear moves people. That's why the evening news is larded with violence and threats of violence. Fear sells, and entertainment conglomerates understand that by salting shootouts and garrotings and punch-ups into the entertainment menu, they can build audience share.

Putting eyeballs in front of TV sets is what broadcasting is all about. Violence is like pornography. It has that neck-snapping duality that drags our eyes from whatever to comprehend the sudden danger. Adrenaline is the hole card up the sleeve of the visual salesman. So guns are everywhere in our media culture. They are "The Great Equalizer" of a thousand cowboy movies. And gang movies. And drug movies.



Given all that kind of free advertising for the advantages of gun possession, that the heater in your holster helps you to wipe out your enemies, take what you want, and blow away societal restraints, it is remarkable that more people don't covet guns. The gun lobby has so much going for it.

Till there's another high-profile outrage, like the assassination of a famous person or a bloody swath scythed by the Columbine High School shooters in Colorado. Such mass executions do not have to be swallowed whole by a society that has lost its spirit of self-defense.

We can control guns and we don't have to live in fear of the 200-million odd firearms salted away in this country. When many teen-agers fear that the unstable kid who confronts them might have access to one of the 60 million handguns in America, no wonder some kids are afraid to go to school by day or out by night.

There have been nine school shootings in just two years, with almost 100 people shot on school grounds. Every day, 14 kids age 18 or younger die from bullets. Every day, 94 people are fatally shot, some by their own hand, says John Rosenthal, the founder of Massachu-

setts-based Stop Handgun Violence.

You have to be a certain age to buy alcohol or drive, but disturbed kids can lay hands on killer weapons. The government regulates toy guns so kids don't kill themselves accidentally, but the craven Congress cowers before the gun lobby, so real guns are virtually unregulated at the federal level.

But there are successes. Massachusetts has the nation's best record on regulating firearms. Over the past four years, Rosenthal calculates, the state has witnessed a 41 percent reduction in gunshot injuries and deaths. That spawned "the lowest violent crime rate per capita in the country," he argues. "Massachusetts gun laws work."

How? By requiring training, licensing, a 21-year-old age limit, safe storage, child safety devices, and limits on gun dealers operating out of their car or garage sales. We enforce the assault-weapons ban and banned "Saturday Night Specials." We track gun traffickers, steer kids away from guns and gangs, and encourage police chiefs to go slow on issuing gun permits.

This works. It's not as dramatic as the tobacco crackdown that wrested \$300 million per year for the foreseeable future for Massachusetts from the cigarette manufacturers. But similar legal pressures tighten the noose around the gun makers.

The British showed what an aroused populace could do after their own horrific school massacre; they banned handguns. We're not there yet. We still produce a gun every 20 seconds in this country. But the death toll is hard to hide. No amount of blather from Charlton Heston can obscure the fact that 34,000 people die annually from gunfire, intended or accidental — almost as many as the 40,000 who perish in car wrecks.

The gun lobby is strong in rural areas. But the tobacco lobby was thought to be even stronger and richer and more invincible, and tobacco is on the ropes. We regulate alcohol a bit; we're starting to regulate tobacco. And we'll get there on guns. Gunpowder cannot be as addictive as nicotine.

David Nyhan is a Globe columnist.

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July 22, 1999

Are Gun Laws, and Agency That Enforces Them, Equal to the Task?

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By FOX BUTTERFIELD

BALTIMORE -- It was another routine transaction in the deadly business of how criminals get their guns.

In March 1998, a stranger paid 21-year-old Tia Branch \$200, drove her to the Baltimore Gunsmith store near her housing project and showed her a \$700 semiautomatic pistol he wanted. Outside the store, he gave her the money for the gun, and she went back in and bought it. As a convicted felon, he was barred by Federal law from buying a gun.

The sales clerk did not question the young woman, although law-enforcement officials say the clerk should have known from the couple's behavior that it was an illegal straw purchase. Baltimore Gunsmith has made so many similar sales, they say, that the store is responsible for selling 20 percent of the guns used in crimes that the Baltimore police have traced in the last nine years.

GOING AFTER GUNS
[First of two articles.](#)

Police officers, Federal agents and prosecutors have tried numerous times, using existing gun laws, to shut the place down since 1991. Despite these efforts, it still remains open.

As Congress debates gun control, the gun industry and its supporters often say that the United States has enough gun laws already, that what is lacking is enforcement. But a review of cases like the Baltimore Gunsmith and of the agency charged with enforcing Federal gun laws, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, reveals a much more complicated situation.

The bureau, an arm of the Treasury Department, was created with limited power, has existed under constant threat of attack by the

National Rifle Association, has been kept short-staffed and has to enforce laws often written to make prosecutions difficult.

An examination of the bureau also shows a major distinction in its approach to the job. Historically, it has arrested a sizable number of criminals who use guns in robberies or drug sales, particularly career criminals with three or more convictions. These are considered safe cases that do not arouse N.R.A. opposition.

Until recently, the bureau has been less aggressive in what is now being recognized as a critical part of gun control: going after illegal gun traffickers and the small number of corrupt dealers, among the 104,855 federally licensed dealers, who supply guns to criminals and juveniles.

While half of all crime guns traced by the A.T.F. in the past two years were linked to just 389 dealers, only 42 dealers were recommended for prosecution last year, and only 19 had their licenses revoked.

"There is not a whole lot of vigor in gun enforcement," said Julius Wachtel, who retired last year after 23 years as a firearms agent. When it comes to investigating dealers, traffickers or gun shows, he said, the agents have a saying: "No cases, no waves. Little cases, little waves. Big cases, big waves. All those years of being hammered by Congress have had a chilling effect."

In an interview, John W. McGaw, the director of the A.T.F., acknowledged: "I virtually never use the term 'gun control' because that would make us anti-gun. Everything we touch is unpopular and controversial, so we have to be very careful to do what Congress has decided we should and be neutral regulators, not take sides in the gun debate."

Under Mr. McGaw, a former director of the Secret Service who became director of the A.T.F. in 1993 after the raid on the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Tex., the number of gun trafficking cases recommended for prosecution rose to 788 in 1998, up from 533 in 1994.

In keeping with what Mr. McGaw sees as his Congressional mandate, he has formulated a policy of treating gun dealers as "partners," members of the legitimate firearms industry whom agents often rely on for tips on straw purchases or gun traffickers.

The bureau's small size -- its 1,631 agents are only 9 more than in 1973 -- means it sometimes must forgo investigations, prosecutors say.

And the agents must spend much of their time investigating bombings and arsons, as well as enforcing the laws on alcohol and collecting tobacco taxes.

By comparison, the number of agents in the Drug Enforcement Administration has grown to 4,261 today, from 1,370 in 1973.

"This shows that Congress has never decided it is serious about going after gun trafficking the way it is about the war on drugs," said David Yassky, an assistant professor at Brooklyn Law School and a Democratic counsel to the House Judiciary Committee.

"With drugs, we've realized we've got to go all the way up the chain," Mr. Yassky said. "If all you do is arrest the crack addict, we won't get anywhere. But with guns, we only arrest the end user, the shooter."

Federal gun laws underscore the difference in priority between drugs, which are illegal to sell, possess and use, and guns, which start out as legal products, and illustrate the difficulty the bureau faces in pursuing gun control.

A dealer who sells 1,000 or more guns to criminals might get only six months in jail, but for drug dealers there are stiff mandatory minimum prison sentences of up to 25 years, even for selling small quantities.

Undercover purchases are a common tactic of drug agents, but under appellate courts' rulings, firearms agents may not pose as felons buying guns. Agents must use an actual convicted felon in undercover operations, which makes prosecution more difficult because juries are reluctant to believe convicted felons.

In addition, the Firearms Owners Protection Act of 1986, a law championed by the N.R.A. and sponsored by Senator James A. **McClure**, an Idaho Republican who has retired, and by Representative Harold L. **Volkmer**, a Missouri Democrat who lost his seat in 1996, raised barriers to prosecutions.

Mr. **Volkmer**, now living in Hannibal, Mo., said the law was still necessary to rein in what he sees as an overzealous Government agency. In the minds of firearms agents, Mr. **Volkmer** said: "It's almost like, if you are a gun owner or dealer, you're weird or not legitimate. They believe the only way to resolve violence is to take away our guns."

Mr. **McClure** did not return phone calls to his office or home seeking comment.

The Origins: From Moonshine To Gun Control

The law limited A.T.F. agents to only one inspection of a dealer a year, reduced record-keeping violations by a dealer from a felony to a misdemeanor -- a disincentive for Federal prosecutors in cases where a dealer has forged or destroyed his records to hide evidence -- and required prosecutors to prove that dealers who sold guns to criminals or straw purchasers did so "knowingly and willfully," a nearly insurmountable hurdle, lawyers say.

It also prohibited the A.T.F. from establishing any national system of gun registration, which makes tracing the origin of guns used in crimes much more difficult.

"The gun laws weren't very strong to start with," said William J. Vizzard, a retired firearms agent who is now a professor of criminal justice at California State University in Sacramento. "But after **McClure-Volkmer** they were Swiss cheese."

The firearms bureau's difficulties lie partly in its origins. It was created with little planning when Congress, after the assassinations of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968 and of Senator Robert F. Kennedy two months later, hastily passed the Gun Control Act of 1968.

That law required that everybody dealing in firearms be licensed by the Federal Government, and it prohibited convicted felons, illegal immigrants and drug addicts from buying guns. The law gave the Government no power to regulate the manufacture, design or marketing of guns. Indeed, Representative John D. Dingell, a Michigan Democrat who was a member of the N.R.A. board of directors, had the gun industry exempted from the new Consumer Product Safety Commission.

The agency charged with supervising the 1968 law was the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Division of the Treasury Department. Until 1968, its agents were mainly revenueurs, famous in film lore for tracking down whisky stills, largely in the Southeast. Most of the agents themselves were Southerners who grew up with guns and were likely to be members of the N.R.A.; they had little interest in the new notion of gun control.

Mr. Wachtel, who joined the agency in Phoenix in 1972, the same year it was renamed the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, recalled that his first training officer "basically knew nothing about firearms trafficking."

But soon Mr. Wachtel and other new agents began making some

alarming discoveries.

"We walked into gun shows and found you could buy a machine gun, which was illegal, without even having to give your name," Mr. Wachtel said. They also stumbled on dealers "who were putting guns on the streets without paper," he said, selling to criminals without keeping the required records. And Mr. Wachtel said they found that traffickers would buy guns in states with lax gun control laws, like Georgia or South Carolina, and then drive them north for resale to criminals in Washington or New York.

In short, by the late 1970's the new agents had an understanding of how guns moved quickly from manufacturers, wholesalers and dealers to criminals. But as they began to make criminal cases, gun industry supporters in Congress held angry hearings into alleged abuses of law-abiding gun owners and dealers.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan, at the urging of the N.R.A., announced the elimination of the A.T.F., and many agents were given layoff notices, until his Administration later reconsidered the action.

And in one of the most famous attacks on the A.T.F., Congressman Dingell, who was influential in the defeat of a gun-control bill in the House on June 18, called firearms agents "a jackbooted group of fascists who are perhaps as large a danger to American society as I could pick today."

In 1979, to protect itself against criticism of this kind, the A.T.F. ordered that any agent who wanted to investigate a gun dealer had to get permission from headquarters in Washington. This policy lasted until the Clinton Administration. Mr. Vizzard remembered "the chilling effect" when he received a reprimand because he was investigating three corrupt dealers concurrently.

David Kennedy, a senior researcher at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and director of the Boston Gun Project, the most successful citywide program to stop gun trafficking, said of the firearms agents: "These people are heroes, and the only fair thing to say is that they have been systematically kept away from doing a vitally important job."

The A.T.F. operates out of an unremarkable, granite-faced eight-story building in Washington. By mandate of Congress, 25 percent of the bureau's time must be spent on explosives, a priority that gained new urgency after the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995. The bombing was directed against the A.T.F. office there in retaliation for the bureau's role in the Branch Davidian raid near Waco.

After the Waco incident, Mr. McGaw, who was popular with Republicans, was appointed director of the A.T.F. He has emphasized training and professionalism as a way to re-create an agency that had its start in moonshine and to give it more of a buttoned-down image like that of the Secret Service or the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Mr. McGaw's most important initiative has been to quadruple the number of crime guns the A.T.F. traces back to manufacturers and dealers, which has led to a much clearer understanding of the role of illegal dealers and traffickers in helping criminals get their guns. But to make the program more palatable to the N.R.A., which always worries about the Government's keeping information on guns, it has officially been described as an effort to stop the flow of guns to juveniles.

Mr. McGaw is not one to lead the call for new gun laws, and he makes no apologies for treating gun dealers as partners. Gun trafficking is a victimless crime, he says, where no one calls up to report an illegal sale, so the bureau depends on having good relations with dealers who can tip it off about suspicious activity.

Mr. McGaw said he was surprised when he took over the A.T.F. and found that all its functions "are negatives, are controversial." Even when it investigates white supremacist groups or the bombing of an abortion clinic, the bureau has drawn criticism.

So to avoid attacks on the bureau's budget, he tries to steer a course down the middle. "For our agents, some of the laws may be frustrations," he said, but he added that these impediments "tell us what Congress wants us to do."

The Problem: Quirks in the Law Help the Dealer

Law-enforcement officials first became interested in Baltimore Gunsmith in 1991 when Detective Ed Bochniak of the Baltimore Police Department went to the home of a drug dealer, Anthony Jones, 18, to investigate the fatal shooting of a 13-year-old girl in his bedroom.

In the Jones home, the police found receipts showing that Mr. Jones's cousin, Sheila Kelly, had bought eight guns for \$5,274 from Baltimore Gunsmith, and Ms. Kelly later confessed that Mr. Jones had paid her to buy them. The guns included a .40-caliber Glock semiautomatic pistol, two 9-millimeter Glock semiautomatic pistols, a 9-millimeter Beretta semiautomatic pistol with a laser sight and a Cobray Streetsweeper shotgun. One of the pistols killed the 13-year-old; another had been used to shoot two drug dealers.

Detective Bochniak turned over the evidence to the A.T.F. office in Baltimore. But when firearms agents recommended prosecution to the United States Attorney's office in Baltimore, they were turned down.

A spokesman for the United States Attorney said he could not discuss the case because no prosecution had been made.

But agents involved in the investigation said they were told the prosecutor feared that the case would be nearly impossible to prove, given the quirks in the gun laws. Under the **McClure-Volkmer** standard, the agents would have to show that the owner, Anthony A. DiMartino, had sold the eight guns to Ms. Kelly knowing that she was a straw purchaser.

In other words, they would have to prove his state of mind.

That would take valuable extra time, the agents were told, and even if by chance Mr. DiMartino was found guilty, the prison sentence would be only a few months, not the kind of high-profile case that ambitious Federal prosecutors usually seek.

With no trial, Baltimore Gunsmith kept selling hundreds of guns that turned up in crimes in the city, the police found, and the A.T.F.'s agents kept trying to catch Mr. DiMartino. In 1996 they mounted an undercover operation. They could not take the easy path, posing as felons, since Federal courts had ruled that the buyer must be an actual felon.

Instead, an agent posing as a waitress and equipped with a hidden tape recorder bought a .22-caliber Beretta pistol at the store, saying she was buying it for a convicted murderer whom Mr. DiMartino knew. Again, the United States Attorney's office declined to prosecute. Even if Mr. DiMartino was convicted, which would be difficult, he might simply transfer his firearms license to his son, who worked in the store, agents say the prosecutor's office told them.

Mr. DiMartino's license was up for renewal at the time. But Mike Campbell, a spokesman for the A.T.F. in Baltimore, said Federal law required the bureau to hold off on any revocation and automatically renew a license during a criminal investigation to 'insure citizens' rights.

Last March the agency scheduled a revocation hearing, but it was postponed when a firearms agent who had been part of the investigation could not attend because he had been transferred to another city. No new date has been set.

The lawyer for Baltimore Gunsmith, Richard Karceski, said his client had done nothing wrong.

The Blame: Finding Fault With Congress

James Baker, the chief lobbyist for the N.R.A., said that dealers who violate the law "ought to be prosecuted," but that the **McClure-Volkmer** standards "were put in to protect law-abiding people from well-documented abuses by A.T.F."

"We don't think forcing A.T.F. and the Justice Department to prove a case should prevent effective law enforcement," he said.

But Detective Bochniak, who is now assigned to a special new gun squad, said, "From the point of view of local law enforcement, all this is very frustrating. Whose fault is it? Should people sue the gun dealer, or the A.T.F. that failed to shut the store down?"

The fault, he said, is "in the law, and all the judges and politicians that don't take guns seriously."

Sometimes the oddities of the gun laws can mar even a successful prosecution.

B&E Guns, in Cypress, Calif., is the second largest dealer in the state. Firearms agents had long been suspicious about B&E Guns, and in 1990 they got the owner's license revoked for forging records of his purchases and sales. But that did not deter the owner, Robert Komor. He simply transferred the license to his wife, Esperanza Juan-Komor, said Tom Makar, the agent who handled the investigation.

In the mid-1990's, more than 200 guns that the A.T.F. had traced to B&E Guns began showing up in murders, robberies and shootings in Southern California. Other guns traced to B&E Guns were being smuggled into Japan and Australia.

The bureau raided B&E Guns, and after its agents pored through the shop's files they found that it had illegally sold about 9,000 guns in less than two years, Mr. Makar said. It was one of the biggest such sales in the United States. The store had improperly accounted for the sale of 3,000 of the guns by listing them as having been sold to other dealers who were unaware of the transactions. There were no records at all for the remaining 6,000 guns, Mr. Makar said, even though manufacturers and wholesalers reported that they had sold the guns to B&E.

It was lucrative, agents said, because a gun with no paper trail could

be sold to criminals for double the normal markup.

Despite the seriousness of the case, the United States Attorney's office in Los Angeles last year allowed the Komors' son, Zak Komor, who was the store's manager, to plead guilty to only five counts of causing a false statement to be made in B&E's record books involving just 24 guns. He was sentenced to a year in prison. No one else was prosecuted, and the store is still open.

Michael Brush, Mr. Komor's lawyer, said the A.T.F.'s claim that 9,000 guns were involved was exaggerated. The Komors' mistake, he said, was just "sloppiness in record keeping, not an attempt to put guns in the hands of criminals."

The United States Attorney's office declined to answer questions about the deal, saying the court records were under seal. But several agents familiar with the case said they believed that prosecutors had simply run up against the **McClure-Volkmer** law, which reduced fraudulent record-keeping by a dealer to a misdemeanor.

Mr. Vizzard, the former A.T.F. agent in Sacramento, says the problems with gun control lie in Congress. He recalled that at Senate Judiciary Committee hearings in 1995 into the deadly standoff between Government agents and white separatists at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, a number of Senators, Democrats and Republicans alike, had grilled Herb Byerly, a firearms agent, on his decision to arrest Randy Weaver, a separatist, after Mr. Weaver had sold an informer two sawed-off shotguns and offered to sell him five more.

If Mr. Weaver had sold only two sawed-off shotguns, said Senator Arlen Specter, Republican of Pennsylvania, "It is a little hard to understand how you can say to this subcommittee that this man has a profile as a gun trafficker."

Watching the hearings on television, Mr. Vizzard said he wondered if Congress took gun crimes seriously. For one thing, selling or even possessing an unregistered sawed-off shotgun is a felony. But what would the Senators have said, he wondered, if it had been a young boy selling just two vials of crack cocaine? That is punishable by years in prison.

And what would the Senators say now, after the shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., last April? Two of the four guns the teen-age killers used -- and the ones that claimed the most victims -- were sawed-off shotguns. Would the Senators still say, Mr. Vizzard wondered, "only two sawed-off shotguns?"

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National Solutions to Gun Violence

By John E. Rosenthal

As a businessperson, gun owner and concerned citizen, I am outraged by the lack of effective national gun laws and the resulting epidemic of gun violence in America.

There have been six mass shootings in the same number of months. Over 150 people have been killed at more than 100 shootings on school properties in the last five years.

We have seen our children and neighbors shot and killed at schools, the US Capitol, day care centers and churches.

Today and everyday in America another 94 Americans will die from firearms, including 14 children under the age of 19. Last year over 34,000 of us were killed by guns almost as many as killed by automobiles.

While more people than ever are looking for answers, still a majority of elected officials in State Houses and The US Congress continue to blame everything except the absolute common denominator in all 34,000 firearm deaths each year - easy access to guns.

No one disputes having national laws regulating the manufacture, sale and possession of automobiles or every other less dangerous consumer product. After all cars are very dangerous, especially if misused. Last year automobiles resulted in over 40,000 deaths, down from 50,000 twenty years ago.

To drive a car you must be of proper age, receive government approved training, pass a state sponsored written and operating test, and submit to national licensing and registration of every vehicle. In addition, car makers must comply with minimum manufacturing and safety standards, which are continually updated and used by manufacturers as selling features. The result is we have experienced annual reductions in car deaths, cars include more and more safety features and we all feel safer as a result.

Why then are firearms and gun ownership not held to the same standards? Guns are deadly and inherently more dangerous than cars. Why do we allow our children and ourselves to be increasingly at risk of being victims of random and premeditated gun violence while gun manufacturers, dealers and owners are virtually unregulated?

The answer is simple. The gun lobby has controlled the gun debate in the United States Congress and as a result there are virtually no effective national gun laws. In fact, because of congress there are more national manufacturing standards for toy guns than real guns.

Congress has even restricted the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms from effectively regulating gun dealers and gun sales by passage of the 1986 "Firearms Protection Act". It's absolutely no wonder we are the only nation in the developed world experiencing a gun violence epidemic that kills more than 650 Americans a week.

The ultimate reality is that we will continue to experience monthly massacres and daily tragedies until the general public turns their outrage into action and the US Congress finally passes effective national gun laws.

Conversely the state of Massachusetts has enacted the most comprehensive gun laws in the nation. Since 1994 Massachusetts has experienced a 53% reduction in gun violence (1998 WRISS Data) and now has the lowest violent crime rate of any industrialized state in the country. In fact, nationwide states with the toughest gun laws have reduced violent crime at twice the rate of states that allow concealed weapons and have lax gun laws. For example, in Texas where gun laws are almost nonexistent violent crime especially with guns is among the highest in the country. Governor George Bush has opposed background checks at gun shows, has supported carrying concealed weapons, including in churches and hospitals and has signed legislation prohibiting cities from suing gun manufacturers. Further in Texas a woman is 3.5 times more likely to be assaulted with a gun than in Massachusetts. Since Governor Bush signed the Texas concealed weapon law there has been a 54 % increase in arrests by concealed weapon permit holders.

There is ample proof that gun laws work and are effective in reducing gun violence. Congress must enact common sense national gun laws similar to what Massachusetts has already tested and proven to save lives without banning most guns.

These necessary National Gun Laws include the following:

- Gun Owner Training and Licensing
- Gun Registration
- Gun Manufacturing Standards and Consumer Protection Regulations by the National Consumer Product Safety Commission (NCPSC)
- One Gun a Month
- 21 Age Requirement for Gun Ownership
- Regulate all secondary gun sales and gun shows the same as Federally licensed gun dealers.
- Ban Saturday Night Specials
- Ban Assault Weapons and High Capacity Ammunition clips
- Repeal McClure-Volkmer Act
- Safe Storage (CAP Law)
- Law enforcement and Juvenile Violence Prevention Programs (City of Boston Model)

Training

Like driver's education, require a state sanctioned gun safety training course to assure safe and proper use of firearms before obtaining a gun license.

Licensing

Renewable gun licensing with photograph, similar to a drivers license. Renewable every four years to provide an opportunity for an updated background check and confirm suitability of gun ownership and criminal record.

Registration

Like all automobiles, require registration of all firearms, so law enforcement can track stolen guns, gun use and trace firearms used in crime.

National Manufacturing Standards

Create minimum consumer protection standards for all gun manufacturing and oversight by the National Consumer Product Safety Commission. Currently all other consumer products ranging from toy guns to lawn darts, etc. are subject to certain performance and manufacturing standards regulated by the NCPSC, except real guns.

One Gun a Month

Limit non-dealer or collector gun purchases to one per month. Currently an individual can purchase an unlimited number of guns and illegally resell or traffic them to children, criminals or others. Virginia passed a One Gun a Month law when it was proven that 47% of guns recovered in crimes in New York City were purchased in Virginia. After the law was passed Virginia was no longer a gun source state for gun traffickers. The BATF has also reported that 51% of juvenile gun crimes were committed with guns purchased legally and resold illegally by "straw purchasers". This law would dramatically reduce gun trafficking and straw purchases.

21 Age Requirement

Like drinking alcohol, gun ownership should be limited to responsible adults 21 years of age and older.

Regulate Secondary Sales

Require background checks at gun shows and for all private sales. Currently guns are sold at over 5,000 gun shows each year, with no questions asked or records kept unless sold by a licensed gun dealer. Several high profile mass shootings have taken place with guns purchased legally at gun shows. Private gun sales (non-dealer) currently require no record keeping or background checks and account for roughly 50% of guns sold at gun shows.

Ban Saturday Night Specials

A high percentage of gun crimes and accidental shootings occur with cheaply made, inexpensive and particularly small and concealable guns known as Saturday Night Specials. These guns are frequently made of inferior materials and without safety features, and are particularly accessible to criminals due to the inexpensive cost. Massachusetts and California have passed such legislation with little or no opposition from the major gun manufacturers.

Ban Assault Weapons

These high-powered military style assault weapons are often used against police officers and are weapons of choice for career criminals and gangs members. Although assault weapons make up approximately 1% of the gun stock they are traced to over 9% of gun crimes and a high percentage of police fatalities in the line of duty.

Ban Importation of High Capacity Ammunition Clips

Ammunition clips holding nine (9) or more rounds.

Repeal McClure-Volkmer Act

Congress passed the McClure-Volkmer Act known as the "Firearms Protection Act of 1986". This law restricts the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms from inspecting licensed gun dealers more than once a year, and from making undercover weapons purchases. In 1998 there were more than 104,000 federally licensed gun dealers of which just 389 were responsible for the sale of 50% of all crime guns traced by the ATF in the past two years. Yet only 19 dealers had their licenses revoked. One such gun dealer still in business is Baltimore Gunsmith who law enforcement say is responsible for selling 20% of guns used in crimes that Baltimore police have traced in the last nine years.

The above referenced national laws combined with effective law enforcement and juvenile gun violence prevention initiatives such as the city of Boston has implemented would dramatically reduce gun violence in America without banning any guns other than assault weapons and Saturday Night Specials. These laws are no different than all other consumer product laws currently in effect, and simply regulate the manufacture, distribution, sales and enforcement of an inherently dangerous product.

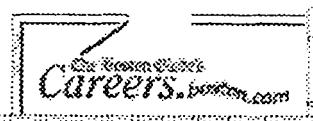
If one state such as Massachusetts, which has enacted most of these gun laws, can reduce gun injuries by 53% in just four years, it is reasonable to expect a similar reduction nationwide if such laws are passed by Congress.

It is time gun owners and non-owners alike find common ground based upon common sense solutions to gun violence. Effective national gun laws will dramatically reduce gun injuries and deaths without imposing unreasonable restrictions on responsible gun owners. It's imperative that the silent majority speaks out, participate and demand that Congress and every candidate seeking local, state and national office support common sense national gun laws.

John E. Rosenthal is the President of Meredith Management Corporation, a successful Massachusetts real estate firm. He is also the founder and chairman of Stop Handgun Violence (1995) and Friends of Boston's Homeless (1987). These non-profit corporations have become national models for reducing gun violence and homelessness through providing a vehicle for business people and concerned individuals to participate in solution oriented changes in public policy.



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The hidden costs of handguns

By Derrick Z. Jackson, Globe Columnist, 02/24/99

This is not what we meant by a booming economy. US gun makers sold between \$2 billion and \$3 billion worth of arms last year. With the gun makers showing no conscience over the pain of their profits, their loaded customers unload onto America a staggering bill that far surpasses the sales themselves.

Gunfire leaves America with up to \$4 billion a year in direct medical costs, according to a 1995 study in The Journal of the American Medical Association. While a name-brand handgun can cost as little as \$250, and a 9mm pistol magazine can cost \$25, medical experts estimate that the average cost of treating one gunshot victim can cost anywhere from \$14,000 to \$33,000.

That does not figure in long-term medical costs, police services, lost wages, and lost quality of life. Published estimates of all those costs can add up to between \$300,000 and \$400,000 per victim. The Handgun Epidemic Lowering Plan (HELP), which operates out of Children's Memorial Medical Center in Chicago, estimates that each firearm fatality costs \$938,500.

The annual cost to the nation of gun violence is vague, but every estimate is stunning. The 1995 study in the AMA journal estimates \$20 billion. HELP's estimate is \$33 billion. A 1996 study in the Textbook of Penetrating Trauma estimated \$112 billion.

Whatever the numbers, taxpayers directly or indirectly pay 80 to 85 percent of the bills because so many victims lack health insurance. The bills are too much for the nation's mayors. Chicago and New Orleans have filed lawsuits against the gun industry. Boston and other cities plan to sue. They are suing because they can no longer wait on the White House or Congress, which regulate guns less than burgers, Barbie, and air bags.

Boston officials estimate that gun violence costs the city \$10 million a year. Hospitals and taxpayers in Philadelphia pick up \$29 million a year

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to pay for the care of uninsured victims of gunfire. Louisiana taxpayers spend \$6 million a year to treat uninsured gun victims. Gun control advocates say the annual cost of firearm injuries in New York City surpasses \$94 million.

To the mayors, guns are more than an issue of crime. Peter Welsh, an aide to Mayor Menino in Boston, said: "We're riding a tidal wave of interest in this in terms of consumer protection and public health. We want to hold handgun manufacturers responsible the way car manufacturers and tobacco companies are held responsible."

Tobacco is a fitting comparison. Deputy Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers said last year that the national medical cost of smoking was \$45 billion. The total cost in lost wages and productivity, fires caused by smoking, and other expenses led Summers to estimate the total cost of smoking to be \$130 billion. That is close to double the revenue of the two top American cigarette makers, Philip Morris and RJR Nabisco.

In direct medical expenses alone, the cost of gun violence and smoking to society would be enough to pay for over half of the \$112 billion that the General Accounting Office estimates would be the cost of repairing or replacing the nation's public school buildings. Add in lost productivity and students would have not only buildings but access to the Internet and after-school activities to keep them off the streets. Summers said:

"It is important to recognize that all of these represent, in the language of economics, real resource costs. That it is to say, the \$130 billion that smoking costs is much more burdensome to our economy than the same amount levied in taxes, which impose a cost on consumers but provide offsetting revenues to our government. It is proverbial that there is no such thing as a free lunch. But in a sense, successfully preventing people from acquiring an addiction they do not want to have - by effectively combatting youth smoking - is a free lunch with real benefits for our economy as well our nation."

The same is true of gun violence. Put \$2 billion to \$3 billion of gun sales next to \$20 billion or \$33 billion in the costs of those sales to society and you have an argument stronger than ever before that handguns have no place in the hands of civilians. For that reason, it is encouraging to see mayors stand up where Capitol Hill trembles.

The suits will not be easy. Some mayors have already found state legislatures and governors in their way. Atlanta wants to sue, but the pro-gun Georgia legislature this month passed a law to ban such suits. In Louisiana, gun-ho Governor Mike Foster has announced that he wants to ban a suit filed by New Orleans, prompting Mayor Marc H. Morial to declare it a "sad sellout to the money and the power of the gun lobby."

But there are too many cities, too many places that have suffered, to have all the suits blocked. Let them all challenge the gun industry with the same kind of gauntlet thrown down by Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley. When Chicago filed a \$433 million lawsuit last fall against gun makers and distributors, Daley said:

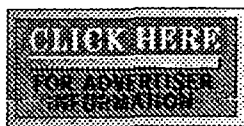
"If money is the only language they understand, then money is the language we will use to make them understand that they have no business in Chicago. We're going to hit them where it hurts - in their bank accounts - and we won't stop hitting them until they stop flooding our streets with guns."

Derrick Z. Jackson is a Globe columnist.

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