

COLUMBIA POLICE DEPARTMENT



Office of the Chief

Date:

"You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today." – Abraham Lincoln

Dear _____:

I have often been asked by concerned, elected officials, especially after a senseless violent crime, "What can we do to help?", "What needs to be done to prevent senseless acts of violence?" I know that I don't have all the right answers, but I do know of a place to start. First, we must all take ownership of our roles in preventing and reducing violent crime. The men and women of the Columbia Police Department are working tirelessly to reduce gun violence in our City, but law enforcement is only part of the solution. The legislative branch of local, state and federal governments must also do their part to become more harmoniously engaged with one another to seek commonsense solutions. Simply put, "Everyone's got to get on the same page."

I can think of several simple, commonsense, actionable items that could be accomplished through legislative action. As a respected member of the S.C. General Assembly, you have the opportunity to effect meaningful change to our existing laws. Therefore, I respectfully submit the following recommendations:

Felon in Possession of Gun

- Federal Law prohibits anyone with a felony conviction from possessing a firearm, but in South Carolina, only convictions from a list of specified crimes would bar possession of weapon. For instance, if a person is convicted of Strong Arm Robbery, that person may legally possess a firearm under South Carolina law but be prohibited under federal law. Since local law enforcement cannot arrest a person for a violation of federal law, the state should mirror the federal statute

which would prevent anyone with a felony conviction from possessing a handgun.

Graduated Sentencing or Punishment

- In South Carolina, a person's potential sentence for his first conviction of unlawful possession of a handgun is exactly the same as the fifth conviction of that crime. The state should enact graduated or progressive sentencing for those convicted of illegal gun possession. Meaning, after each arrest the penalty is more severe. Comparably, shoplifting in South Carolina for a first offense carries a penalty of up to 30 days in jail, second offense up to 30 days in jail and 3rd offense up to 10 years in prison.

Mental Illness and Distress

- If a licensed physician or mental health professional is concerned enough to order an evaluation of a person for their safety or the safety of others, then that patient should be prohibited from possessing a weapon. The State should temporarily prevent anyone being evaluated for a mental health condition from possessing a weapon. Just hit "pause" for a moment until a certified or adjudicated determination one way or the other can be made.

Addiction and Drug Use

- Drugs and guns do not mix. Consistent with the federal government, South Carolina should strengthen the prohibition against possessing or owning a gun if you are addicted to drugs or use illegal drugs.

Background Checks

- Establish one reasonable and universal standard for everyone to follow when conducting background checks of those desiring to purchase a firearm.

I have had the honor and privilege of being the Columbia Police Chief since April 2014. I am also honored to be a member of the S.C. Police Chief's Association. I can say with certainty that not only do my colleagues agree with my recommendations, but they also share my view that it is past time for everyone to take ownership of the gun violence plaguing our communities. The gun debate continues loudly while attempts for meaningful discussion never seem to result in solutions. Meaningful discussions get lost to extreme positions and counter arguments of pundits and activists on the left and right. With that said, I am certain with your leadership and courage real solutions can be found.

Sincerely,



*W. H. "Skip" Holbrook
Chief of Police*

