

# PROTECT *Minnesota*

WORKING TO END GUN VIOLENCE

For immediate release

January 26, 2011

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ST. PAUL -- In a surprise move, the Minnesota House Public Safety and Crime Prevention Committee today approved a drastic change to Minnesota law by voting to completely revoke the sections of Minnesota law that require a background check before a gun purchase. The committee voted to pass the bill 10-7 along party lines, with Republicans voting yes and DFLers voting no.

The bill's author, Rep. Steve Drazkowski, justified the proposal on grounds that the state background check system duplicates the Federal instant background check system. But that argument was refuted by the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association and the Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association.

Bloomington Police Sgt. Mark Elliot, who supervises the city's gun licensing, said that last year, 541 people in Bloomington applied for permits to purchase a gun. Of those, 37 were denied. Had Minnesota had only the Federal background check system, none of these people prohibited from owning a gun would have been denied a permit, because the grounds for denial are not in the Federal database, Elliott said.

Minnesota's system also prohibits some people convicted of violent misdemeanors from buying guns, while Federal law does not. Some of the disqualifying crimes in Minnesota but not Federal law include stalking, false imprisonment, 4th-degree burglary, and crimes related to domestic violence and gang activity. In Minnesota, people charged with a crime of violence, awaiting trial, and placed in a pretrial diversion program are also prohibited from buying a gun.

The state does not collect data on the number of denials of permits to purchase. However, the state does report the number of permits to carry a pistol that are denied, all by local authorities. In 2009, local authorities received 22,378 applications. They denied 374, suspended 19, revoked 1, voided 12, and cancelled 7.

(See Bureau of Criminal Apprehension report at <http://www.bca.state.mn.us/cjis/documents/CarryPermit/2009PTSReport.pdf> )

The bill would make it easier for dangerous people to get guns, said Heather Martens, executive director of Protect Minnesota/Citizens for a Safer Minnesota. People with mental illness, such as the Virginia

Tech shooter, who was prohibited from owning a gun, would slip through the background check system because of the lack of data in that system.

"Which side are you on?" Martens asked the committee. "Criminals who want easy access to guns, or the public, which wants law enforcement to keep guns out of the wrong hands?" In a poll earlier this month, Mayors Against Illegal Guns found overwhelming support for strengthening the background check system for gun purchases. 77 percent of respondents, including 74 percent of gun owners, supported fixing the gaps in government databases that are meant to prevent the mentally ill, drug abusers and others from buying guns. . For more details, visit [www.mayorsagainstillegalguns.org](http://www.mayorsagainstillegalguns.org).

In Minnesota, a University of Minnesota poll found 82 percent of Minnesotans supported background checks before all gun purchases.

"Arizona has no state background check system, and Arizona has a very high rate of gun death. Minnesota needs to keep its lower rate of gun death. Our background check system is critical if we want to do that," Martens said. Nationally, the states with stronger gun laws have lower rates of gun death than those with weak laws, she said. But it is international comparisons that are most striking. Canada and European countries, all of which have stronger gun laws, have gun death rates much lower than those in the United States.

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