

PROTECT MINNESOTA

Gun deaths and injuries are preventable

www.protectmn.org

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SUPREME COURT RULING DOESN'T CHANGE MINNESOTA EFFORTS TO KEEP GUNS OUT OF THE WRONG HANDS

St. Paul, MN – The Supreme Court ruling in the Heller case today indicates that states can go ahead with common-sense gun violence prevention measures like background checks before gun purchases, Citizens for a Safer Minnesota stated today. By establishing an individual right to own a firearm, the court swept away the gun lobby's main excuse not to enact any laws relating to gun ownership – the fear that any law is a first step toward a total gun ban. The court ruled that a total handgun ban is unconstitutional.

“If anything, this decision should put gun owners’ fears about gun regulation completely to rest,” said Heather Martens, President of Citizens for a Safer Minnesota. “It doesn’t change our efforts to ensure that guns stay out of the wrong hands.”

The PROTECT Minnesota campaign is currently running radio ads statewide to raise public awareness that it is legal in Minnesota to buy guns without a background check at gun shows and other private venues. The ad campaign also highlights the importance of secure gun storage. On Monday, June 23, the PROTECT Minnesota campaign held news conferences on the launch of the two advertisements.

In St. Paul, Ramsey County Sheriff Bob Fletcher said that the lack of a background check requirement by unlicensed sellers at venues like gun shows needs to change. Retired Sheriff's Deputy Jerry Dhennin told his story of purchasing a semi-automatic military-style assault weapon at a gun show without a background check. He told the seller “there ain't no way I'll pass a background check,” Dhennin said, but the seller told him that was no problem. Dhennin bought a Ruger Mini 14, which can empty a 30-round magazine in 10 seconds. In Minnesota, only Federally-licensed firearms dealers are required to conduct background checks on potential buyers.

John Blackstone, a board member of the Twin Cities Million Mom March, told of his personal childhood tragedy, when one of his friends found a gun. Ten-year-old John was holding that gun when it discharged, killing his nine-year-old friend.

The Northland chapter of the Million Mom March held a second news conference on the steps of City Hall in Duluth. Speakers were Joan Peterson, President of the Minnesota Million Mom March, Duluth Mayor Don Ness, St. Louis County Sheriff Ross Litman,

Duluth Police Officer Robin Roeser and gun owner/maker Brent Gurtek. Among the speakers, there was a unanimous view that, in order to keep our communities safe, reasonable gun laws, such as background checks on all sales of guns, need to be passed and kept in place. According to Joan Peterson, President of the Minnesota Million Mom Chapters and representative of Protect Minnesota, “all we want is to keep dangerous weapons out of the hands of dangerous and irresponsible people. We will continue with our efforts to pass background checks on all sales of guns so that even unlicensed sellers will be required to perform background checks. Safe storage of guns will continue to be an important part of our campaign as well. This will accomplish much in reducing and preventing gun injuries and deaths.”

The PROTECT Minnesota campaign promotes the prevention of gun death and injury through the secure storage of firearms, background checks for gun purchases, and the interruption of illegal gun trafficking. Partners in the PROTECT Minnesota campaign, which is a collaboration between gun owners and non-gun owners, include Citizens for a Safer Minnesota, the Million Mom March, the Children’s Defense Fund, and other local, state and national groups. The campaign is endorsed by a number of law enforcement officials, the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, and the American Hunters and Shooters Association.

“Gun deaths and injuries are devastating, and they are preventable,” Sheriff Fletcher said. The radio advertisements, “James” and “Sarah,” are intended to bring home the importance of safely storing firearms, and of the need for background checks before firearm purchases. The “James” ad, which focuses on the need for background checks, received the prestigious Radio Mercury Award, a national award, this spring. The ads are airing on radio stations statewide. The ads can also be heard online at www.protectmn.org.

From 2002 to 2006, gun homicides in Minnesota increased 53 percent (55 to 84). During that same period, non-fatal assaults with guns increased 99 percent (194 to 387), according to the Minnesota Department of Health.

The PROTECT Minnesota radio ad campaign coincides with the release of a new report by the Children’s Defense Fund, which states that the rate of gun deaths among children and teens is now increasing for the first time since 1994. The number of children and teens killed by guns in the United States in 2005 would fill 120 public school classrooms. More preschoolers were killed by guns in 2005 than were police officers.

The PROTECT Minnesota campaign’s “Sarah” ad illustrates the devastating toll that improperly stored firearms can take. “Children are curious creatures who want to explore everything in their environment. Safe storage of guns is essential to saving lives,” said Blackstone, who is a board member of the Twin Cities Million Mom March.

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