



www.endgunviolence.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 3, 2010

CONTACT: Joan Peterson, PROTECT Minnesota (218) 428-6570

Heather Martens, Executive Director, Citizens for a Safer Minnesota, (651) 621-3616

esm@endgunviolence.com

**PROTECT MINNESOTA DEPLORES DEATH OF POLICE OFFICER
Calls for prevention measures**

St. Paul, MN - PROTECT Minnesota on Monday issued a statement in response to the death of Sgt. Joseph Bergeron of the Maplewood Police Department:

"The loss of Sgt. Bergeron is a loss to the entire community. We extend our heartfelt condolences to Sgt. Bergeron's family and to the law enforcement community as a whole," said Heather Martens, executive director of Citizens for a Safer Minnesota.

"This is the second police officer killed in the line of duty in Minnesota in the past eight months," said Joan Peterson, a PROTECT Minnesota spokesperson. In September 2009, North St. Paul police officer Richard Crittenden was shot to death in the line of duty by a suspect while responding to a domestic violence call. "This is completely unacceptable. The level of danger posed to police officers, and to the community as a whole, by the number of guns easily available to dangerous people must be addressed," Peterson said.

PROTECT Minnesota, a multi-organization campaign, has called for greater effort to stop illegal gun trafficking, and advocates requiring any prospective gun buyer pass a background check. In March, a bill favored by PROTECT Minnesota was defeated in a Minnesota House committee. The bill, HF 2960, would have required background checks on every person purchasing a gun at a gun show. Closing the so-called "gun show loophole" has been recommended by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms as a way to stem the flow of guns to the illegal market. Background checks conducted by federally licensed firearms dealers have stopped 1.6 million gun purchases since 1994.

The suspect in the murder of Sgt. Bergeron had recently served prison time. People convicted of certain crimes are prohibited by law from possessing a gun for the rest of their lives, but they can easily avoid background checks because of the gun show loophole.

Other countries that have laws in place to prevent dangerous people from getting guns suffer far lower levels of gun death in particular, and homicide in general. In large cities around the world,

**2395 University Ave. W. Suite 317
St. Paul, MN 55114
651 645-3271**

including London, Amsterdam, Frankfurt and Paris, gun deaths are nearly unheard of, and the shooting death of a police officer is extremely rare. In the United States, an average of 32 people are murdered daily with a gun.

The origin of the gun used in Saturday's shooting is currently unknown, and it is unlikely ever to be disclosed. It is illegal for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to disclose the source of a crime gun to the public because of an act of Congress called the Tiahrt Amendment, Martens noted. "The Tiahrt Amendment is an effort to hide the truth from the public and must be abolished," she said. "The public is entitled to know, when crime guns are traced, which dealers are the origin of the most crime guns. The public is also entitled to know when an investigation reveals that crime guns are being trafficked through certain individuals at gun shows."

In March, the Minnesota House Crime Victims/Criminal Records Division voted against HF 2960, sponsored by Rep. Michael Paymar, (DFL-St. Paul), on a 5-3 vote. Those voting for the bill were Reps. Paymar, John Lesch (DFL-St. Paul), and Debra Hilstrom (DFL -Brooklyn Center). Those voting against the bill were Reps. Paul Kohls (R-Victoria), Kory Kath (DFL-Owatonna), Jenifer Loon (R-Eden Prairie), Dave Olin (DFL-Thief River Falls), Ron Shimanski (R-Silver Lake).

Of the endorsed gubernatorial candidates of the major parties, Margaret Anderson Kelliher (DFL) favors closing the gun show loophole; Republican candidate Tom Emmer opposes it. The Independence Party will endorse a candidate next weekend.

###