



Gun Control Policy Position Statement

Background

The Jewish community has a deep and abiding concern for public safety, firmly rooted in Jewish tradition which compels us to uphold the sanctity of life. In recent years, we have witnessed a profoundly distressing series of mass killings in schools, shopping malls, theaters, houses of worship, and elsewhere including the atrocity committed in Newtown, Connecticut in which 20 elementary school children were murdered along with six educators. These violent and horrific acts shock our conscience and country. The pandemic of gun violence in America far exceeds other western nations. The Jewish community itself has experienced this violence at community centers, Jewish federations, and elsewhere.

Investigators report that the firearms used in these tragedies have for the most part been obtained legally. The various high-profile shootings have once again propelled a national debate on the deficiencies in our current firearm laws and spurred local, state and federal gun control legislation.

When evaluating the need for new gun control regulations, it is important to consider the following facts:

- In 2005, California had largest number of firearm deaths among children and teens (474) in the U.S. ¹
- In 2010, guns took the lives of 31,076 Americans in homicides, suicides and unintentional shootings.²
- Some currently available trigger locks and other similar devices are inadequate to prevent the accidental discharge of the firearms to which they are attached, or to prevent children from gaining access to the firearm.³
- Every day, three women are murdered by their intimate partners, and guns are the murder weapon in the majority of cases. ⁴ In addition, abusers who possess guns tend to inflict the most severe abuse on their partners. ⁵

¹ Children's Defense Fund, 2008

² <http://smartgunlaws.org/category/gun-studies-statistics/gun-violence-statistics/>

³ <http://ag.ca.gov/firearms/dwcl/12087.php>

⁴ Fox JA, Zawitz MW. Homicide Trends in the United States. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics; 2006

- From 2009 to 2012, 40 percent of mass shootings—those with four or more victims killed—started with the shooter targeting their girlfriend, wife or ex-wife. ⁶

Jewish Community Concerns

As members of the Jewish community and community at large, we have a compelling interest in supporting effective methods for reducing gun violence for a number of reasons:

- The widespread availability of firearms endangers innocent life and violates the fundamental Jewish teaching that all human beings are created in the image of God and therefore entitled to have the value of their lives respected;
- Hate of another's race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion is a motivation in a significant number of gun-related crimes;
- The potential for shootings at or near schools presents a continuing danger to our nation's children, whose education has been an on-going priority of our community;
- While mental illness plays a role in only a small fraction of gun-related incidents, we remain concerned about the inadequacy of mental health services and funding that may inhibit people from receiving appropriate and timely treatment;
- Gun-related crimes represent a huge percentage of violent crime in the United States.
- The widespread prevalence of violence throughout society – including the violence depicted in the media and other forms of entertainment – is of considerable concern, especially as it may desensitize people to acts of violence and/or contribute to violent behavior.

Recommendations

The Jewish Public Affairs Committee of California (JPAC) therefore supports the following:

1. Establishing and enforcing mandatory gun safety and quality standards, including safe storage of firearms;
2. Controlling the distribution of firearms in a way that minimizes the potential for their unlawful use, including requiring licensing of gun owners and registration of all firearms at the time of sale or subsequent transfer, requiring appropriate waiting periods, volume sales restrictions, as well as mandatory and comprehensive background checks, including criminal and mental health histories, for private sales and at gun shows;
3. Prohibiting the sale of semi-automatic and automatic weapons and the ammunition for them. The sale of other ammunition should be regulated and controlled;
4. Expanding programs such as government firearm buy-back programs and educational efforts to prevent the abuse of firearms in our society;
5. Requiring applicants for gun permits to take comprehensive safety training classes;
6. Increasing funding and access to mental health screening for children, youth and adults, along with training and resources for educators and parents; and,

⁵ J.C. Campbell, Webster J, Koziol-McLain, CR, et al. 2003. Risk Factors For Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results From A Multi-Site Case Control Study. (American Journal of Public Health. 93 (7)

⁶ Office on Violence Against Women

7. Expanding research regarding causes and prevention of violence, and increasing efforts to track and collect statistics on incidences of gun violence in the U.S. so that it can be effectively addressed.

JPAC members and communities will:

- Work with state leaders to support the adoption of meaningful regulations addressing the manufacturing, sales and distribution, registration, and possession of firearms and ammunition that comport with Constitutional requirements.
- Call on State leaders to take direct, swift and unequivocal action to stop the unacceptable violence that tears at the fabric of our society and endangers the lives and safety of all Californians.
- Actively participate in broad-based coalitions to achieve these goals.
- Support efforts to encourage the full enforcement of existing laws aimed at achieving the objectives above.
- Support the use of community coalitions and school-based programs to reduce gun violence through a variety of innovative and traditional methods.