

Any access to firearms should, in the view of these witnesses, be strictly controlled so that only those whose competence, attitudes, and mental stability are beyond reasonable doubt could acquire a firearm. Some of the suggested approaches to achieving this goal involved access being allowed only to those over the age of 21, except with parental consent; mandatory waiting periods of up to six months; fees for FAC applications that would not only cover the full cost of firearms regulation, but also discourage ownership by those who were not serious about firearms use; extremely thorough FAC investigations; and mandatory possession permits which would have to be registered and renewed annually. Some witnesses strongly recommended that there be no storage of firearms permitted in homes or cottages. In sum, Mrs. Suzanne Edward, the mother of one of the École Polytechnique victims, expressed the sentiment of these witnesses well when she stated that "in Canada, gun ownership is a privilege, not a right... the legislature must differentiate between need and want (and) legislate in the best interest of the safety of Canadians as a whole".

Other witnesses argued with equal passion that millions of Canadians use firearms legitimately and responsibly for earning their livelihoods, and for recreational hunting, target shooting, and collecting. They argued that these owners and their firearms do not pose a danger to society, and that further controls are simply unnecessary. While they also cited a concern with the misuse of firearms at least equal to that of those who do not own guns, they felt that the present provisions are more than adequate if fully implemented and enforced. For example, most support more widespread and effective training in the safe use of firearms and they expressed disappointment that the requirement enacted by Parliament in 1977 in this regard had never been put into force.

Many firearms owners also objected strongly to the suggestion that they represented a "gun lobby", and that their views should therefore be discounted. They stated that they were appearing only to represent and protect their legitimate interests, as is the right of anyone who will be affected by proposed changes in the law. They believe that their views have been misrepresented, and that their expertise has not been given due attention in the design of the proposed changes. They are also concerned that the activities of the responsible majority are being unnecessarily and unfairly impinged upon because of the actions of a few, and that the criminal use of firearms should be the primary concern.

Moreover, it is their belief that only the imposition and strict enforcement of penalties for firearms offences would affect the criminal use of firearms. They argued that the government's package of measures, while imposing further controls on law-abiding users, would have little impact in this regard. Mr. Rick Morgan, the Executive Vice-President of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, concluded that the government's proposals "are misdirected and do not address the real issues or the big picture. In that sense, it is not only unfair to ethical, law-abiding firearms owners, it is also unfair to society as a whole".

Several themes were sounded by witnesses from all perspectives, and these concerns form the common thread that can be found in all of the evidence heard by the Special Committee. Virtually all of the witnesses agreed that there are legitimate uses for firearms. One of the problems faced by the Committee was, however, the difficulty of ensuring that the legitimate purposes and uses of particular firearms were defined and regulated so that public safety would not be unnecessarily endangered. The common method seen as the most effective way to achieve this balanced objective is to focus on the initial access point to firearms and to ensure the existence of adequate screening and training at that point.