

Coalition for Gun Control

December 4, 1991

Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Senate
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4
by Fax: Attention Heather Lank, Committee Clerk (C-17)

Dear Senators:

I appreciate having had the opportunity to appear before you yesterday. I am submitting, as requested, comments regarding the regulations which will support Bill C-17. These are preliminary comments and that we would welcome the opportunity to consult further with your Committee or the Minister of Justice on these issues. I have also briefly outlined the issues not addressed by the Bill which should be considered for future amendments. While we support quick passage of the Bill as it is written, I would request that the registration of firearms and controls on the sale of ammunition be further investigated by the Minister of Justice, with a view toward bringing forward additional amendments at a later date.

1. REGULATORY POWERS

Assault Weapons

Assault weapons pose a threat which outweighs their value for legitimate hunting or sporting activities. Some assault weapons are semiautomatic versions of fully automatic weapons and these have been prohibited in Bill C-17. The Minister has promised to ban other military style assault weapons. Current owners will be 'grandfathered' if they register as collectors. It is clear that the efficacy of these controls will depend in large part on the regulations which follow and the way in which the provisions of the law are administered.

In their submissions the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Bar Association, among others, recommended that the grandfather clause allowing current owners to keep their converted automatic weapons be deleted because as long as such weapons remain in the hands of lawful owners they are subject to theft. Currently an estimated 50,000 are in circulation. At the same time, we have had reports that since the intention to ban assault weapons was announced, sales of these weapons have increased dramatically. While the controls on magazine capacity will reduce firepower, the potential for non-compliance with magazine capacity limits makes it doubly important that assault weapons using large capacity magazines be removed from circulation. On the other hand, owners of these firearms have protested that confiscation of such weapons is an infringement of their liberties. In order, therefore, to satisfy the concern for public safety in light of the grandfather clause, the Minister should move as quickly as possible to ban these weapons and that:

- the assault weapons and devices to be prohibited should include weapons where the potential hazard to the public appears to outweigh the benefit for legitimate hunting or sporting activities
- all conversions from fully automatic to semi automatic to be carefully inspected
- the definition of gun collectors be strict and ensure that gun collectors are carefully screened and controlled

The primary intention of the Bill will not be satisfied if a large (and growing) number of these guns remain in circulation.

Restrictions on Magazine Capacity

Large capacity magazines increase the hazard posed by certain weapons. Assault weapons have large capacity magazines to minimize reloading requirements and to maximize lethal effects. A large capacity magazine is not required for hunting and is required by a limited number of competitive shooters involved in legitimate, internationally recognized sports. (While many have argued they are needed for paramilitary and 'practical' shooting we do not believe that exemptions should be granted for these activities). Magazines are generally relatively inexpensive. Therefore:

- magazines should be restricted to 5 shots for long guns (centrefire, semiautomatic) and 10 shots for handguns
- the restrictions on magazine capacity should include a narrow and precise definition of the competitors and the sports exempted from the restrictions and the way in which they will be controlled.

Again, if a large number of these remain in circulation, public interest will not be served.