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Presentation to the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Study on gun control, illegal arms trafficking, and gun crimes committed by members of street gangs

Remarks by Chief Evan Bray
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Mr. Chair, members of this distinguished committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. My name is Chief Evan Bray and I co-chair the CACP Special Purpose Committee on Firearms that has been tasked to study the growing concerns related to gun violence in Canada from a public safety perspective.

Firearms is a polarizing debate that can be highly divisive and emotionally charged on all sides of the issue. The CACP believes in balancing the privileges of individual Canadians with the broader rights of society. As police leaders, we place a priority on public safety and the protection of the most vulnerable among us.

The committee is composed of numerous experts from across the country working together to understand the complexities of firearm crime in Canada.

The CACP is working closely with Public Safety Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and the Canadian Firearms Program.

Combining our expertise in guns and gangs, investigative firearms tracing, statistics, etc. opened the door to enhanced collaboration and information sharing.

The Committee identified four key themes to help guide its work: strategic approaches, legislative initiatives, education and prevention, as well as data collection and information sharing.

Over the past two years, we provided feedback on firearm-related legislation such as Bill C-71 and Bill C-21 to improve what is a strict and responsible form of gun ownership in Canada.

While we should always strive for continuous improvement with legislation, we also need to find ways of reducing gun violence in our communities, using the best, evidence-based practices.

How crime guns make their way into our communities, the types of guns being used for criminal purposes, the perpetrators using guns to commit crimes, and many other areas related to firearms can differ greatly across the country. To ascertain how, when, why, and where firearms are being used to commit crimes in Canada, we need “good data”.

To this end, the Special Purpose Committee on Firearms worked with the Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics to ensure good firearms data was being collected consistently across Canada.

In 2021, we set new standard definitions for firearms terminology related to “shootings” and “crime guns”.

We also amended the *Uniform Crime Reporting Survey* to include new firearms codes to distinguish between seized, stolen, and recovered firearms. The first results are expected in the Fall of 2022.

Two large areas requiring further work are the origin of crime guns and firearm tracing in Canada.

With our partners, we are conducting a study on the origins of crime guns to monitor trends and examine the effectiveness of policies and interventions.

In parallel, we are also working to increase the uptake and capacity to complete firearm tracing. We want to understand the benefits and challenges with respect to the existing process in Canada, to better inform operational steps and address legislative gaps related to gun crime.

The issue is not law-abiding Canadians who want to own firearms; the issue is people that are involved in criminality who are obtaining firearms through illegal means such as cross-border trafficking, theft from legal gun owners, and straw purchases.

The absence of purchase records effectively stymies the ability of police to trace a non-restricted firearm that has been used in crime. Firearm tracing can assist in identifying the suspect in a crime, the criminal sourcing, and the trafficking networks.

The disturbing trend in gun violence is largely related to gangs, lower-level street gangs and more sophisticated organized crime groups. To stop it requires a whole of society approach. It starts with education and prevention early on to address the root causes that lead people to the gang lifestyle in the first place.

It's also about exit strategies for people in those lifestyles and leading them towards a healthier path in life.

And finally, it's about enforcement and ensuring that we are going after the criminal elements who are perpetrating violence in our communities.

We want proper investigative techniques in place and appropriate consequences for those who commit acts of violent crime.

In conclusion, we respect the debate that is occurring and understand the various positions on this issue. It is not our goal to punish law-abiding citizens for the actions of criminals. Our goal is to ensure the safety and security of all Canadians.

Thank you.