



Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police
Association canadienne des chefs de police

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

**C-21 - An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential
amendments (firearms)**

Remarks by: Chief Evan Bray
(Co-Chair, CACP Special Purpose Committee on Firearms)

Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police

October 27, 2022

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to address this committee on behalf of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

The CACP believes that the proposed legislation recognizes that stopping gun violence requires a whole of society approach including education and prevention to address root causes, as well as law enforcement to help stop the criminal elements who are perpetrating violence in our communities. We believe Bill C-21 will help prevent victimization by way of a firearm and improve public safety.

Handguns

The CACP supports a national, versus municipal patchwork approach to managing the issue of handguns in Canada. We believe that a **handgun freeze** is one method of reducing access to these types of firearms, while allowing existing law-abiding handgun owners to practice their sport. However, we continue to maintain that restricting lawful handgun ownership will not meaningfully address the real issue: illegal handguns obtained from the United States that have led to the disturbing current trend in gun violence that is largely related to gangs, street gangs, and more sophisticated organized crime groups.

Firearms smuggling and trafficking

This is why we particularly support the implementation of **new firearms-related offences, intensified border controls**, and **strengthened penalties** to help deter criminal activities and to combat firearms smuggling and trafficking, thereby reducing the risk that illegal firearms find their way into Canadian communities and are used to commit criminal offences.

The CACP welcomes changes that provide **new police authorizations and tools** to access information about license holders in the investigation of individuals suspected of conducting criminal activities such as straw purchasing and weapons trafficking.

Replica firearms

The CACP agrees with implementing initiatives that target the criminal use and diversion of firearms to the illicit market by prohibiting the importation, exportation, and sale of **replica firearms**, specifically those that are a likeness to real firearms and are indistinguishable from the genuine articles from near or far, or that can be altered to convert them into deadly weapons. This is something the CACP urged the government to do in a resolution passed by our membership back in 2000.

Replicas are encountered in the hands of criminals for street-level extortion, robbery, personal protection from other criminals, and to intimidate or terrorize victims when committing an offence. As a result, there has been a regrettable need for police officers to resort to the use of deadly force in situations where they believe replica firearms to be authentic.

Contributing to police concerns for public safety are also the facts that imitation firearms are largely unregulated and that users can acquire them easily without proof of age, licence, or competency.

The CACP is not opposed to recreational activities involving the use of airsoft guns. However, those who use these replicas for recreational purposes and who emphasize the importance of the 'likeness' to real guns and long-range shooting capacities of over 500 feet per second to enhance the gaming experience have never found themselves in a real-life situation facing an individual engaged in criminal activity who is armed with a gun.

Reducing firearms-related deaths in cases of family violence and self-harm

The CACP also supports the **red flag law**, **yellow flag law**, and **the requirement to surrender firearms during a legal challenge of licence revocation** as impactful ways to help reduce gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, and self-harm by limiting access to firearms by those who pose a risk of harm to themselves or others.

Newly-prohibited firearms

Regarding the mandatory **buyback program** or the requirement to **make assault-style weapons permanently inoperable**, the CACP is still awaiting the details on the implementation of such a program and the implications for, and expectations of, police services in Canada.

Having said that, the CACP recognizes and understands concerns expressed by certain provinces about using Canadian police resources to confiscate legally acquired firearms from Canadians.

The buyback program is essentially an administrative process, not a policing issue. As a result, such a program could be managed by entities other than police services, thereby allowing police resources to be focused on those who refuse to follow the new law and, more importantly, on addressing border integrity, smuggling, and trafficking priorities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the CACP supports improving safety for the public and front-line police officers. Reasonable requirements on responsible firearm owners need to be balanced with protective measures to help mitigate the impact of the worst outcomes of firearms. While we agree with the proposed changes of Bill C-21 in principle, we must now focus on what these mean in practice and clarify the role police services are expected to play in enforcing these new regulations.