

Guidelines on Gun Control and Gun Violence

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Approved by the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin, Sonoma, Alameda and Contra Costa Counties

Background

Recent months have brought a sharp increase in high profile shootings around the country. 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 state and federal gun control legislation.

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

- According to a 1997 study by the United Nations, the United States has weaker firearm regulations and higher numbers of deaths involving guns than all other industrialized nations combined;
- On average, 14 young people below the age of 20 are killed by guns in this country every day and handguns are now the leading killer of children in California;
- A gun kept in the home is 43 times more likely to kill a family member or friend rather than an intruder;
- Firearms are one of the few products manufactured in the U.S. that are not subject to minimum safety standards;
- More people in California are killed by guns than by motor vehicles.

Jewish Community Concerns

As members of the Jewish community and community at large, we have a compelling interest in supporting effective methods for reducing firearms 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 life respected;
- Hate of another's race, 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;
- Shooting rampages have taken some of our leaders, as other communities have lost leaders too, including a past president of the AJ Congress in the 101 California tragedy and a synagogue president in the 1999 shooting rampage in Atlanta.

Recommendations

The Jewish Community Relations Council therefore supports the following objectives:

1. increasing gun safety standards;
2. controlling the distribution of firearms in a way that minimizes the potential for their unlawful use;
3. limiting or banning the availability of weapons which are widely used in violent crimes, such as handguns and assault weapons; and
4. expanding programs and educational efforts to prevent the abuse of firearms in our society.

We strongly support efforts to encourage the full enforcement of existing laws and the following specific proposals—as well as similar proposals aimed at achieving the objectives above:

- Licensing of all gun owners;
- Registration of all firearms;
- Mandatory and comprehensive background checks, including at gun shows;
- Restrictions on the manufacture or sale of certain categories of firearms;
- Mandatory safety and quality standards;
- Eliminating the practice of the resale of weapons by police departments;
- Measures to prevent gun violence among youth, including new research.
- Requiring applicants for gun permits to take comprehensive safety training classes.

In addition, we strongly support the use of community coalitions and school-based programs to reduce gun violence through a variety of innovative and traditional methods.