

ACWS POSITION ON GUN CONTROL

As part of a larger strategy to combat violence in our society, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters SUPPORTS strong gun control legislation that includes the screening and licensing of gun owners and the registration of all guns.

ACWS supports the existing system and opposes any changes to the legislation that will relax the requirements and erode the strength of the legislation in order to appease those who oppose it.

We support changes to the legislation that would make it illegal for anyone convicted of a domestic assault to own a gun rather than the current 5 year prohibition.

- Gun control is less about guns than it is about violence. When guns are readily accessible, they become the vehicle for expressing violence.
- Guns play a frequent and fatal role in violence against women and are the weapon of choice in domestic homicide. On average, 40% of women killed by their husbands are shot.
- Guns are often involved in the cycle of intimidation and violence against women and children in their homes. One Alberta shelter estimated that at least 30% of its clients had been threatened with a gun.
- Chief Justice Catherine Fraser, in her decision at the Alberta Court of Appeal in 1998, agreed that gun control is a gender issue.
- In Canada, 77% of people living with gun owners support the legislation; in Alberta, 54% support the firearms registry.

ACWS believes gun control legislation is linked to the safety of women. On average, a woman is assaulted thirty times before a formal complaint is filed. Firearms increase the chance of assault escalating into murder. The lethality risk for women increases significantly when the abuser has a gun. For that reason, ACWS supports a change in practice that would see all restraining orders and Emergency Protection Orders (EPO's) require the removal of all registered and non-registered weapons as standard practice.

Previous to Bill C-68, (the Firearms Act which was proclaimed as law in 1995)

- there was inadequate screening of applicants for a Firearms Acquisition Certificate (FAC)
- there were few controls on the sale of ammunition
- some assault weapons could be obtained with a simple FAC
- there was no requirement for firearm registration or a limit to how many guns someone could own.

These issues are now addressed in legislation.

ACWS believes that gun control legislation assists in the elimination of some of the conditions that contribute to the violence and abuse of women where firearms are involved. The following are some of the advantages of this legislation:

- Licensing gun owners and registering firearms helps to keep guns away from people who pose a threat to themselves or others and removes firearms from situations where women are at risk.
- Improved screening of gun owners and informing police of complaints or incidents involving a gun owner allows police to take preventative action more quickly
- Registration of firearms helps prevent people with a record of violence from easily obtaining a firearm and enables Prohibition Orders to be enforced. This contributes to the protection and safety of women who are threatened with guns.
- Stiffer sentences for firearms related offenses, called for in Bill 68, acts as a deterrent to violating Prohibition orders.
- Current and previous spouses of license applicants are notified of an individual's intention to acquire a firearm license. If a spouse has concerns, it triggers a secondary review of the application.
- Registration ensures accountability and encourages safe storage which can eliminate many impulsive domestic homicides.

According to information from the Coalition on Gun Control, the new system IS working.

- Since 1998, over 9,000 individuals have been refused firearms licenses or had their licenses revoked by public safety officials, resulting in potentially dangerous people being prevented from owning guns.
- 26,000 calls have been made to the firearms line concerning applicants for licenses (many of these are as a result of the spousal notification process.)

- On average, every week, there are between 13,000 – 15,000 queries to the registry from police across Canada for information to assist investigations, provide evidence for prosecutions, and help officers assess the likelihood of guns being present as they approach a volatile situation.
- Stronger firearms laws over 10 years have contributed to a decrease in deaths and injuries from accidents, violence and suicides with guns. Firearm deaths in Canada are the lowest they have been in 30 years.
- Improved efficiency and accountability are important and being addressed by changes to the program.

ACWS believes in a world free from violence and abuse. While gun control, alone, is not a solution to domestic violence, it can play an important role in preventing avoidable deaths. Despite the cost overruns to date, the vast majority of Canadians (74%)¹ and experts in policing, crime prevention, public health, and domestic violence, support the concept of gun control and the registry of weapons as an important part of addressing the problem of domestic violence. *“The key point is this: The money has already been spent, and we are not going to get it back. If we scrap gun control, we have nothing, and are jeopardizing the safety of our women, children and communities.”*² Public safety must remain the top priority.

¹ Environics Poll (Feb. 2003) from “Gun Control in Alberta” www.guncontrol.ca

² Edmonton Journal, Wed. Jan. 21, 2004. “How critics of gun control miss the mark.” An article by Jan Reimer in IDEAS section

Highlights of ACWS Activities in relation to Gun Control

Date	Activity
Feb. 1995	After reviewing Bill 68, ACWS passed a motion to support the concept of gun control and firearm registration.
Sept. 1995	ACWS presented a brief in support of Bill-68 to the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.
Sept. 1995	The Province of Alberta supported by Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories and Yukon announce they will challenge the constitutionality of the law in Court.
Dec. 1995.	In spite of the gun lobby opposition, Bill C-68 is proclaimed as law.
Dec. 1996	ACWS, among others, obtains intervenor status in support of the law and the Federal Government in the constitutional challenge to oppose the law.
Sept. 1997	Constitutional Challenge is heard in the AB Court of Appeal
Spring of 1998	Gun control regulations are finalized. At the request of the Canadian Firearms Centre, ACWS participated in developing a training video to be used by police services across Canada
Summer 1998	ACWS was invited to participate in a teleconference with the Coalition for Gun Control, Caveat and the New Zealand government on gun laws and coalition building.
Sept. 1998	ACWS participates with others in education and action in response to the gun lobby demonstrations.
Oct. 1998	Alberta Court of Appeal upholds the constitutionality of the law. Chief Justice Catherine Fraser reaffirms the importance of licensing and registration to any effective gun control system. Alberta announces its intention to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court.
Dec. 1998	ACWS partnered with the Canadian Firearms Centre in a Research Project on "Domestic Violence Involving Firearms in Alberta: Case Studies of Women and Children".
1999	The province of Alberta initiated a constitutional challenge against the Firearms law. ACWS applied for and received intervener status to appear before the Supreme Court on the Constitutionality of Canada's Firearms Act.
Feb. 2000	The Supreme Court of Canada heard Alberta's challenge. ACWS presented to the Supreme Court hearings in favor of the Act.
June 2000	In a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Canada's Firearms Act.
Sept., 2000	ACWS issued a Press release in response to the Gun lobby's attack on Gun Control.
Early 2003	Auditor Generals report reveals a number of problems in the system of implementation of the legislation but did not question the fundamental principles of the law. A consultants report proposes changes to improve efficiency but will jeopardize public safety
March 2003	In response to a request from the Coalition on Gun Control, ACWS wrote a letter in support Bill C-10
October 2003	ACWS member participated in the Canadian Firearms Consultation in Calgary
October 2003	Letter to Hon. Wayne Easter, Solicitor General
December 2003	Letters to the Hon. Anne McLellan and the Right Hon. Paul Martin
January 2004	Opinion Editorial to the media in response to the call for a federal review of Gun Control. (Appeared in Edmonton Journal, Jan. 21, 2004)
January 2004	Letters to Anne McLellan, Albina Guarnieri, Belinda Stronach, Paul Martin, Jack Layton
February 2004	Meeting with Albina Guarnieri

Facts about gun control

Alberta has one of the highest rates of firearms-related deaths and one of the highest rates of hospitalization for gun injuries in Canada:

- Between 1990 – 1997 there was a yearly average of 155 firearm deaths in Alberta.
- Alberta's average rate of firearm deaths between 1990 and 1997 was 5.8 per 100,000. The Canadian average is 4.3 per 100,000 (Kwing Hung Firearms Statistics. March 2000). A third of domestic homicides involve firearms.
- Alberta's rate of children killed with guns is more than double the national average.
- In Alberta, rifles and shotguns are the firearms most often recovered in crime and these guns figure prominently in domestic violence.

- The vast majority of Albertans (over 70%) support firearm registration. Experts in policing, crime prevention, public health, and domestic violence support the legislation.³

Since The Montreal Massacre on Dec. 6, 1989, more than 15,000 Canadians were killed and 12,000 others injured by misused firearms.

Firearms are the third leading cause of death among Canadians 15 – 24 years old. A 1997 survey of industrialized countries showed Canada was the fifth among industrialized nations in the rate of children under 14 years killed with guns.⁴

More than 6 inquests over the past 10 years have made a strong case for licensing and registration including the inquest into the murder of Arlene May (19987) who was shot and killed by a former lover with a legally acquired rifle and the inquest into the Vernon Massacre (1997) where Mark Chahal killed his estranged wife, eight people in her family and then himself with his legally acquired gun.)

Firearm owners are overwhelmingly male (86%) while over 75% of victims of spousal homicide involving firearms are women.

³ www.guncontrol.ca/Content/provinces.html all facts above

⁴ www.guncontrol.ca/Content/Domestic_Violence.html (all facts above to footnote1)