



Game Changing Gun Control Bill Expected to Receive Royal Assent

Supporters gather to celebrate culmination of the Coalition for Gun Control's 34-year campaign for stronger laws

Ottawa, ON, December 14, 2023: Today, dozens of Coalition for Gun Control supporters will gather in Ottawa in anticipation that Bill C-21, an Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms), will be sent, unscathed, for Royal Assent, by the Senate of Canada early this evening. The game-changing Bill reflects more than thirty years of advocacy by the [Coalition for Gun Control](#) to make Canadians safer from gun violence. The legislation (Bill C-21) responds to the concerns of experts, community groups and Canadians from coast to coast, and proposes measured but effective solutions. It also addresses the [recommendations](#) of the Mass Casualty Commission, the most extensive review of firearms violence ever undertaken in Canada, with concrete measures to remove firearms from people who are a risk to themselves or others, a ban on handguns and on military-style semi automatic firearms, and measures to reduce the diversion and smuggling of firearms.

Founded in the wake of the Montreal massacre, the Coalition has worked nationally on evidence-based strategies to reduce gun violence. Their efforts are supported by more than 200 healthcare, violence prevention, community, victims, public safety and women's organizations.

"The legislation passed today is a long time coming," said Wendy Cukier, co-founder of the Coalition for Gun Control. "When Paul Martin proposed a national handgun ban in 2006, there were about 340,000 legally owned restricted handguns in Canada. Now there are more than one million and the use of handguns in crime has increased dramatically. Smuggled guns are part of the problem, but sadly, handguns are also misused by legal owners or diverted from legal owners to crime."

The call for a ban on handguns began with the Concordia University shooting in 1992, amplified by many Coalition supporters including former Toronto Mayor David Miller, United Mothers Opposing Violence Everywhere (UMove) and other parents of gun violence victims like Elaine Lumley and Karen Vanscoy, among others. "However, the Danforth shooting, which involved a stolen handgun, really was the tipping point," said Cukier. "The City of Toronto passed a resolution calling for a handgun ban with the help of leaders like former Mayor John Tory and former councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam. The Danforth Families and Doctors for the Prevention of Gun Violence helped drive our Trigger Change campaign forward."

The ban on military-style semi automatic firearms is also long overdue. "I have a letter from then justice minister Anne McLennan, dated 1999, promising to ban the notorious AR 15 and

the Ruger Mini 14, used in the Montreal massacre,” said Cukier. Sadly, Canada, is now the biggest foreign buyer per capita of American rapid-fire weapons in the world. Following the Portapique, N.S. shooting in 2020, 1500 models of these guns were finally banned through regulation and the new law provides a definition to help keep these up to date. “While Indigenous peoples have a right to hunt, handguns and military-style semi-automatic firearms are not reasonably used in hunting and the risk outweighs the utility,” said Cukier. “And, the claim that smuggled guns are the only problem flies in the face of the evidence. Many, if not most, mass shootings in Canada have involved legal gun owners or guns that were at one time legally owned” she noted. [The Montreal massacre](#), the [Quebec Islamic Centre](#), and [Dawson College](#), for example. “While nothing can undo the devastating tragedy and horrific impact of gun violence victims, their families and the community, this law will reduce the chances of such events recurring.”

Cukier comments on the long and challenging process of Bill C-21. “The process has been very challenging - this is the fourth version of Bill C-21. The first, with a focus on banning handguns in cities, satisfied no one and died on the order paper. The second was criticized by some gun control advocates for not going far enough but the third version, arguably, went too far. This Bill does not impede legitimate use of firearms for hunting and predator control, but it does move us forward in significant ways while respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples.”

Cukier, coauthor with Vic Sidel, past President of the American Public Health Association, and Coalition experts provided extensive [research](#) and expert testimony in support of the Bill to drive home the critical importance of the law which she described as a “game changer.” Victims also put faces to the statistics showing the devastating impact of gun violence in all its forms. Cukier explains, “While gang violence is a problem it is not the only problem: We cannot ignore the role of legally owned guns in intimate partner violence, suicide, hate crimes and mass shootings. Despite popular perceptions, our research shows gun violence is a bigger problem [in rural communities](#). We also were able to demonstrate the role of legal guns in mass shootings and their links to domestic violence. And, we were able to ensure voices that are often excluded were at the table and that community impacts across the country were considered.”

“The Senators really did an amazing job. The Committee dug into the issues and offered thoughtful reflections; in the end, most came to the right conclusion - that public safety must be the priority. That this Bill is what [Canadians want](#) and what Canadians deserve. The attempts to amend it did not succeed thanks to strong longtime support for gun control across the Chamber. Today really is a historic day,” said Cukier.

Dozens of Coalition members and supporters gathered together at the Senate of Canada today to acknowledge the decades of advocacy work and witness the historic moment. Others sent messages of support and watched from afar.

Amanda Dale, Research Fellow, Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa

- “The passing of Bill C-21 will help to tackle the global epidemic of gender-based, intimate partner, and family violence. Those of us who have worked with gender-based and intimate partner violence survivors know that guns are used daily to control and intimidate women (and girls/families) long

before they are used to kill. The law strengthens the mechanisms to remove guns from people who are a threat to themselves or others.”

Pam Palmater, Chair of Indigenous Governance, Toronto Metropolitan University -

“Indigenous peoples face high rates of victimization with firearms, not just in intimate partner violence and suicide but also hate crimes. This legislation focuses on banning handguns and semi-automatic military-style assault weapons. These guns are not needed or reasonably used for hunting. Despite the promotion by the gun lobby about a right to bear arms, only First Nations, Inuit and Métis people have constitutionally- protected rights to have firearms.”

Dr. Alan Drummon, an Emergency Physician, has worked on the issue for thirty years-

“Gun violence is not just an urban issue; rates of gun death and injury are higher in rural communities. And it should not be a partisan issue; it is a public health issue. We have waited decades for this law while witnessing over and over the emotional and physical trauma caused by gun violence, suicide and unintentional firearm injury and death. The passing of Bill C-21 provides sensible gun control measures that will save lives.”

Ken Price, the father of Samantha Price who was shot and survived the Danforth mass shooting in Toronto - “The Danforth Families for Safe Communities in Toronto called upon Canada’s leaders, starting in 2019, to ban the private ownership of handguns and military assault rifles. The handgun freeze in Bill C21 is only part of the solution to addressing the complex issue of gun-related violence but it is an important one. This legislation will go a long way in preventing tragedies like the one our family and community faced.”

Barbara Hall, Former Mayor of Toronto and Former Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission - “I am proud to have been one of the founding supporters of the Coalition for Gun Control first through the Safe City Committee and then as head of the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention (1998-2002). Gun control is an important component of an integrated public health approach to improving community safety. But I can also share that I was robbed at gunpoint and have a first hand experience of the damage gun violence does. Having lived in the USA, I have been alarmed at the proliferation of handguns and escalating gun violence in Canada. I firmly believe this law sets a new path for Canada.”

Karen Vanscoy, whose 14 year old daughter Jasmine was murdered by a 17 year old acquaintance with a handgun originally stolen from a gun store break in - “I have been calling for a ban on handguns for 25 years and, while it may be true that smuggled guns are a big part of the problem, my life was destroyed by the pull of a trigger of a handgun that had been legally owned. As a nurse, I also see the importance of strong gun laws from a health and safety perspective. I know they can help prevent people who are a risk to themselves or others from getting access to guns. And our gun laws also reinforce our values which put a priority on community safety, not ‘the right to bear arms.’”

Dr. Emma Cunliffe Professor, Allard School of Law at the University of British Columbia served as the Director of Research and Policy for the joint Canada-Nova Scotia Mass Casualty Commission (2020 – 2023) established to review Canada's most lethal mass shooting, which took place in April 2020 in rural Nova Scotia - Dr. Cunliffe said: "The Mass Casualty Commission concluded after careful research and broad consultation that regulating access to high-capacity firearms is an indispensable strategy for preventing mass shootings. Firearms control laws have massively reduced the incident of mass casualties in other countries, such as England and Australia. While the Commission's comprehensive package of recommendations should be fully implemented, this new law is an important first step that will save lives in Canada."

Reverend Sky Starr, a minister, therapist and founder and executive director of Out Of Bounds with a mandate to heal trauma inflicted by gun violence, has worked for more than twenty years counselling and supporting victims of gun violence and their families in the Jane Finch area of Toronto - "I have lived with the impact of hundreds of deaths, every one a tragedy. Victimization is not equally distributed; most of the children and youth in our community know at least one person who has been shot and killed. That is not true in other neighborhoods in Toronto. Organizations like United Mothers Opposing Violence Everywhere (UMOVE) have called for a ban on handguns for more than 20 years, yet during that time the number of legally owned handguns has almost tripled. Most of the people in my community support stronger gun control as part of the solution regardless of the vocal opposition."

Heather McGregor, CEO of the YWCA Toronto has supported the Coalition's work from its inception - "YWCA Toronto provides front line support to women, girls and gender diverse people and knows firsthand the damage guns can have on our communities. For every woman who is killed by gun violence, many more live in terror and have been threatened or seen their children threatened with gun violence. Of course, more can be done but this is a historic step forward."

Paulette Senior, President and CEO of the Canadian Women's Foundation - "Canada just marked the anniversary of the Montreal Massacre and we're struggling with the rise in gender-based violence like femicide and intimate partner violence. The presence of firearms in the home is the single greatest risk factor for lethal domestic violence. That's a major concern for all women and gender-diverse people and their children and dependents, especially women with disabilities, Indigenous women, women in the North, and others at elevated risk. Ending femicide and the epidemic of gendered abuse in Canada requires strong, smart legislation that responds to what women and gender-diverse people deal with. We welcome this legislation – which includes rapid removal of firearms licences and weapons from anyone under a protection order - on the path to a safe, femicide-free future."

Elaine Lumley, mother of Aidan, In 2005, Elaine Lumley's only child Aidan, a 20 years old university student, was gunned down outside a Montreal nightclub - "I grew up in northern Ontario where hunting is a way of life. But I know that all guns are potentially dangerous and should be regulated. Handguns, in my mind, serve no legitimate purpose and should be banned."

We need to put the priority on keeping our children safe. Losing Aidan was unbearable. I hope with this announcement other families won't have to go through what we went through."

Jan Reimer, Former Mayor of Edmonton and leader of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters - "As someone who has worked with those on the frontlines of women's shelters, led legal response and reform, and worked to implement state protections obligated at the international level, I can tell you that the patterns of gun violence against women are common across jurisdictions. And unfortunately, so are the politics of denial. Watching the destruction of our laws piece by piece over my career was a grim reminder of how quickly the pendulum can swing backward. The presence of guns is a key indicator of the high risk of femicide. A vocal minority has tried to change the Canadian discourse to an American one of gun rights. We know that for every woman who is killed many more are threatened. We also know the terrible irony that where there are more guns, notably in rural communities, there is more opposition to gun control, but there are also much higher risks to women and their children. For those who feel today their privileges have been scaled back, I would remind them that this is not the same as being stalked, threatened and killed by the person who is supposed to love you."

Dr. Barbara Kane, a psychiatrist and head of psychiatry at UHNBC in Prince George has seen the impact of guns in rural communities - "Gun violence is a major public health issue even more in rural communities than in our big cities. We need mechanisms to remove guns from people who are a threat to themselves or others. This law provides some additional tools to support health care professionals and police in ensuring dangerous people do not have access to guns. And it will stem the proliferation of handguns and military style semi automatic firearms which serve no legitimate purpose. It has been a long time coming - I have been working on this for almost thirty years."

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For more information or comment from the CGC, please contact: Kathleen Powderley, kathleen@responsiblecomm.ca or Wendy Cukier, Co-founder, Coalition for Gun Control, wcukier@torontomu.ca or Amanda Dale, Research Fellow, Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa, amandadale92@gmail.com Supporters of the Coalition will also be available for comment. Details to follow. www.guncontrol.ca