

NEWS



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Harrisburg Gun Rally & Press Conference 9/26/06 Statement of Philadelphia Mayor John F. Street

Good morning. Mayors from throughout Pennsylvania and neighboring states, community leaders, clergy members and citizens from around this Commonwealth have come to Harrisburg today to unite against the increasing wave of gun violence that is troubling our Nation. Mayor Bloomberg from New York City is here, along with Mayor Palmer from Trenton, New Jersey, as well as mayors from a number of Pennsylvania cities – Allentown, Bethlehem, York, Lancaster, Reading, Scranton and Williamsport. Gun violence knows no geographic boundaries, and we are grateful to these mayors for lending their voices and their presence today.

We are also grateful for the strong presence of faith leaders who support this effort out of a genuine concern for the welfare of the tens of thousands of their members, who look to them for consolation in the face of both individual tragedy and these troubling times.

In my own City of Philadelphia, 380 citizens were murdered last year - 80 percent of them were killed by handguns. In Pennsylvania homicides caused by firearms have increased by 26 percent from 2000 to 2005. Last year, 557 Pennsylvanians were killed by a gun - 84 percent of all homicides statewide.

This year 30,000 Americans will be killed not by terrorists or the Iraq War, but as a result of an epidemic of gun violence in our nation.

These deaths from the illegal use of guns diminish us all and demand a response. We're here today – to petition the General Assembly to provide more tools for our police and our communities in our fight against guns and violence.

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In Philadelphia we've made unprecedented investments in public safety and we've reduced major crime by approximately 16 percent since 2000. But we still need the General Assembly's help. As we continue to enhance our policing efforts, we need stronger gun laws and more funding for prevention programs which are critical parts of any comprehensive crime reduction effort.

Effective law enforcement must compliment prevention activities such as Operation Safer Streets in Philadelphia, and we will continue to invest in proven programs like the Youth Violence Reduction Partnership. However, Pennsylvania needs stronger gun laws. Weak gun laws compromise local efforts, jeopardize the safety of our police and handicap law enforcement efforts beyond our borders.

This coalition of mayors and leaders from across the country here today support a number of proposals to strengthen Pennsylvania's gun laws that will be debated today by the General Assembly:

We support mandatory reporting requirements for lost or stolen guns. Most people voluntarily report a cell phone or credit card that's been lost or stolen. How can we not require the reporting of lost or stolen devices that, when placed in the wrong hands, become the true weapons of mass destruction?

We also support proposals which require gun owners to keep weapons in a secure lock box; require gun safety and training classes to become certified to own a gun; and limit purchases of handguns to one per month.

We need our General Assembly to act now and pass responsible gun control laws.

A recent statewide poll shows strong public support across Pennsylvania for stronger gun laws (65 percent), and voters also expressed overwhelming support (93 percent) for increased funding for violence prevention and after-school programs to steer youths away from trouble and towards more productive lives.

Voters of all party affiliations and from every section of Pennsylvania expressed support by more than a 2-to-1 margin (65 percent-30 percent) for stronger gun laws. That's encouraging news.

Any long-term comprehensive crime reduction program must include jobs and economic opportunity for our youth and ex-offenders as well.

A job may not be everything, but we would have a better country and Commonwealth if everyone who needed a job had a job which paid a living wage.

There are no short-term fixes to the problems of crime and gun violence affecting our country. This broad-based and bipartisan coalition is growing and it isn't going away and we urge Pennsylvania's General Assembly to act now to help make our communities safer by passing stronger gun laws and providing more resources for our prevention programs as part of a comprehensive program to reduce gun violence and make this Commonwealth a safer place for us all.

Again, we are grateful to the coalition of more than 100 different organizations that are here to support this effort.

We're grateful to the broad and bipartisan group of mayors from around Pennsylvania and the region who agreed to stand with us today. This movement of mayors concerned about the national problem of gun violence began in April in New York City under the leadership of mayor Michael Bloomberg, and we thank him for his participation here today.