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## Presentation to the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence

**C-71 - An Act to amend certain Acts and Regulations in relation to firearms**

Remarks by: Chief Constable Adam Palmer (President, CACP) and Chief  
Evan Bray (Co-Chair, CACP Special Purpose Committee on Firearms)

**Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police**

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Chief Adam Palmer:

Mr. Chair, members of this distinguished committee. As President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP), I would like to express our appreciation for having us appear in front of you today. My name is Adam Palmer, I am the Chief of the Vancouver Police Department.

I am joined by Regina Police Chief Evan Bray who is co-chairing the CACP Special Purpose Committee on Firearms. This group has been tasked by the CACP Board of Directors to study the growing concerns related to gun violence in Canada and the broader Canadian situation, from a public safety perspective.

Realizing that our time is limited, allow me to speak to the broader issue of gun violence and the Bill before this committee. I will then ask Chief Bray to briefly discuss the work of our Committee.

This is a polarizing debate, and can be a divisive and emotionally charged debate, on all sides of this issue. Some law-abiding firearm owners are of the view that they are being criminalized for owning a gun. Some of these are hunters, sports shooters and collectors who represent a love of the outdoors, the sport and the history.

Our past CACP President, Mario Harel, made the following statement at the House Committee on Bill C-71:

*“I can’t speak to the extremes within this debate where ultimately more guns and more firepower are somehow acceptable while to others the only solution is to prohibit all firearms.*”

*I can only speak to what I believe are a far majority of citizens, who are law-abiding and who balance their individual privileges with the broader right of society.*

*They understand and support regulations which, as best as possible, place a priority on public safety and the protection of the most vulnerable amongst us.”*

To be clear, we place a priority on public safety. We place a priority on victimization. We will always speak from that voice.

Gun violence in Canada has undergone ebbs and flows of which there is currently a growing and understandable concern. I join in all calling for better data. However, it is clear that there is a spike in gun violence as we can see in a number of communities across Canada.

We need to find ways of reducing gun violence in our communities, using the best, evidence-based practices. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to this. The disturbing current trend in gun violence is largely related to gangs, lower level street gangs and more sophisticated organized crime groups. To stop it requires a whole of society approach. It starts with education and prevention early on to ensure that we address root causes, which lead people to the gang lifestyle in the first place.

It is also about exiting strategies for people in those lifestyles and leading them towards a healthier path in life. In addition, it's also about enforcement and ensuring that we are going after the criminal elements who are perpetrating violence in our communities.

We currently have a strict and responsible form of gun ownership laws in Canada, including registration of restricted and prohibited weapons, which includes all handguns. We also have strong education requirements for firearm owners. Background checks are also in place, although we believe they could be strengthened, and further checks done to help ensure responsible gun ownership. The current regime is actually very good; however, there is room to enhance and improve the current system.

We need to ensure that those with histories of criminal records, domestic violence, mental health issues, etc. do not have access to firearms. The issue is not law-abiding Canadians who want to own firearms, the issue is people that are involved in criminality who are obtaining firearms through illegal means such as cross-border trafficking, theft from legal gun owners in Canada and straw purchases.

To be clear, the CACP is not calling for a long gun registry for rifles and shotguns. We want to ensure that we have proper investigative techniques in place and appropriate consequences for those who commit acts of violent crime. We also want to better understand where these guns are coming from. Again, we all agree, we need better data, which we are currently working on to improve. We cannot rely on anecdotal stories to make decisions.

We do support Bill C-71 from the perspective that it corrects some of the concerns that have been expressed in our current regulated environment. It is by no means a panacea to stop gun violence. We support it as part of an overall strategy to help prevent victimization by way of a firearm and correct, from a public safety perspective, some of the weaknesses in our current firearm regulations.

We need protections to help mitigate the impact of the worst outcomes of firearms, even if those protections place requirements on law-abiding firearm owners.

Therefore, we agree that there should be corrections relating to who is **eligible to hold a firearms license** so that an applicant's full record, as it relates to violence and criminal behavior, can be taken into account.

We would also **support calls for physicians to be required to advise authorities** if, in their expert opinion, they felt that a person should not be in possession of a firearm for the safety of that person or the public. This is much like the concept of revoking a driver's licence for health concerns.

The requirement that when a non-restricted firearm is transferred, **the buyer must produce his/her firearms license and the vendor must verify its validity** is critical in our view.

We support the need for **record keeping by vendors**. Most reputable businesses are already doing this for their own purposes. Since the end of the long gun registry, the police have been effectively blind to the number of transactions by any licensed individual relating to non-restricted firearms.

**Judicial Authorization must be used to obtain the information** about the buyer from the vendor. The CACP submits the standard to obtain such a specific production order be amended from "reasonable grounds" to "reason to suspect."

The absence of such records effectively stymies the ability of police to trace a non-restricted firearm that has been used in crime. The tracing of a crime gun can assist in identifying the suspect in a crime and criminal sourcing (trafficking networks).

In the United States, it is interesting to note that they federally mandate each store to track and keep records of gun sales.

We support restrictions with regards to the **Transportation of prohibited and restricted firearms**. It was our view that the prior change that allowed authority to transport was too broad and allowed too much latitude for abuse. In practical terms, it allowed the license holder to carry the firearm at times beyond the proper purpose and intent.

We support elected officials determining firearm classes, however, we must rely on the professional expertise provided by the **RCMP to classify firearms** and do so without political influence. Their impartiality lies in public safety, which as I stated earlier, must be given priority.

The CACP also welcomes clarification of section 115 of the Criminal Code relating to **automatic forfeiture**. This clarifies that court orders to take firearms out of the hands of criminals and unsafe persons include any of the firearms already held by law enforcement.

On the greater issue of gun violence and what the CACP is doing, I would ask Chief Evan Bray to say a few words:

Chief Evan Bray:

Thank-you Chief Palmer.

Many of you are aware of the British Columbia Task Force on Illegal Firearms who issued its final report to the BC government on September 30, 2017. Included in this report were a number of recommendations including asks of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. As such, and given growing concerns related to gun violence in Canada, the CACP has created a Special Purpose Committee (SPC) on Firearms.

This group is made up largely of policing expertise (guns and gangs, investigative firearms tracing, statistics, firearm officers, academics, etc.) and with national geographic representation. The group is co-chaired by Deputy Chief Bill Fordy (Niagara Regional Police Service) and myself.

The intention of the SPC is to use the BC report as a basis to look at a wide array of firearm related issues, of which handguns will be included. The CACP really wants to understand the broader Canadian situation before landing on particular policy positions to be presented to our Board of Directors.

I will not get into timelines at this point. Our goal is not to rush this, but to focus our efforts under four key themes:

- Strategic Approaches
- Legislative Initiatives
- Education and Prevention
- Data Collection and Information Sharing

Chief Adam Palmer:

I realize time has run out.

Let me just finish by saying that we respect the debate that is occurring and understand the various positions on this issue. It is not our goal to punish law-abiding citizens for the actions of criminals. Our goal is simply to ensure the safety and security of all Canadians.

Thank you.