

ONTARIO'S FIGHT FOR TOUGHER GUN LAWS

TORONTO — The McGuinty government has led the fight for zero tolerance on gun crimes and continues to call on all levels of government to work together to do all they can to make communities safer. Legislation was introduced by the federal government today to change conditional sentences and mandatory minimum sentences imposed for gun crimes.

The McGuinty government is on the side of Ontarians who are concerned about crime and safety. That is why it remains committed to doing everything in its power to fight gun violence.

“Whitehorse Accord”: Ontario Led National Consensus On Gun Crimes At Federal-Provincial-Territorial Justice Ministers’ Meeting, In Whitehorse, Yukon, November 2005

Ontario’s call for a crackdown on violent gun crime was met with a commitment for legislative change from the federal government. Ontario’s proposals resulted in a national consensus that sentences for gun-related offences should carry mandatory minimum sentences. At this meeting, Ontario championed the two new gun theft offences, “breaking and entering to steal a firearm” and “robbery to steal a firearm”, that would be created under the federal legislation introduced today.

Call To Federal Leaders To Act On Gun Crimes

Ontario has called on federal leaders to make Criminal Code changes that would:

- Incorporate reverse onus bail provisions for gun related crimes
- Toughen punishments for breach of bail conditions for gun-related offences
- See mandatory minimum punishments attached to all handgun possession-related charges, and,
- Impose a ban on handguns

A \$51-Million Package To Fight Gun Violence, January 2006

The Ontario government announced a \$51-million package, which provides for:

- Additional police resources, including fast-tracking the hiring of 1,000 new officers
- The expansion of the Guns and Gangs Task Force by an additional 31 Crown prosecutors
- 12 new victim services staff to work on the Guns and Gangs Task force to provide support to victims of gun crimes
- The expansion of the OPP’s Weapon Enforcement Unit by 15 officers for a total of 58 officers
- The creation of dedicated Major Crime Courts, and

- The creation of a state-of-the-art Provincial Operations Centre.

No Deals For Gun Offenders

Ontario Crown prosecutors are instructed not to withdraw or plea-bargain firearms-related offences for expediency, absent exceptional circumstances. The Crown must also seek appropriate sentences that will act as a deterrent and, in serious cases, consider seeking sentences higher than the mandatory minimum.

Firearms Prosecution Package

Expert Crown prosecutors have developed, and will continue to supplement, a firearms prosecution package available to all Crown prosecutors as a resource in seeking tougher sentences.

Improved Witness Protection Program

The program has been improved to encourage more community members to come forward when they have witnessed a serious crime. The Ministry of the Attorney General has improved short-term protection and reduced the red tape involved in obtaining a new identity and with admission to the program. The Attorney General will continue to work with his federal counterpart to improve the federal witness protection plan so that it can work in a coordinated manner with Ontario's program.

Community Impact Evidence

The Ministry of the Attorney General is implementing new and innovative ways for Crown prosecutors to bring community impact evidence before the courts in seeking tougher sentences. This involves Crown prosecutors developing and presenting evidence to the court about the devastating impact of gun violence on individuals and communities. The newly expanded Toronto Guns and Gangs Task Force will further develop legal arguments to get this type of innovative evidence before the court.

Gun Amnesty

The Project PEACE gun amnesty was implemented by the Toronto Police Service and supported by the Ministry of the Attorney General from November 7-30, 2005. A total of 261 guns, including 33 handguns, and 1,554 rounds of ammunition were collected.

“Blitz” Inspections of Gun-Licensed Businesses

The government funded a blitz inspection of 32 gun-licensed businesses in Toronto to ensure gun storage and safekeeping standards were being met. The Chief Firearms Office is now incorporating unannounced inspections of gun-licensed businesses across the province into its regular procedures. Previously, most inspections were scheduled in advance.

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Contacts:
Greg Crone
Minister's Office
(416) 326-1785

Brendan Crawley
Communications Branch
(416) 326-2210

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