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Broad Coalition Opposes Irresponsible DC Gun Bill

WASHINGTON, DC, SEPT. 23, 2008 – A coalition of religious and civil rights organizations has joined together in an effort to stop the Senate’s consideration of H.R. 6842, which would endanger the lives of DC residents and the millions of people who visit Washington each year. H.R. 6842 would remove DC’s bans on semiautomatic weapons and handgun ammunition, repeal registration requirements, and remove criminal penalties for possession of unregistered firearms. In the few remaining days before recessing, Congress should be working to protect Americans – not to place them in greater danger.

Leaders of organizations opposed to this bill issued the statements below:

“The Talmud teaches us that “he who takes one life it is as though he has destroyed the universe and he who saves one life it is as though he has saved the universe.” This bill is a wrongheaded effort that wrests responsibility for the safety of DC residents and visitors from the city’s leaders, and clearly risks the proliferation of guns on DC’s streets. Our Jewish tradition demands that we continue to act for prudent gun regulation. This bill takes us in the exact opposite direction. Leaders from a broad coalition of faith and civil rights organizations issued the following statements today urging the Senate to oppose the Second Amendment Enforcement Act (H.R. 6842), a bill that would remove Washington, D.C.’s ban on semiautomatic weapons and handgun ammunitions, repeal registration requirements and allow gun possession by violent criminals.”

— **Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism**, Mark J. Pelavin, Associate Director
Press Contact: S. Kathryn Bigam, 202-387-2800

“The Second Amendment Enforcement Act, H.R. 6842, is a dangerous bill that compromises the safety of children and families throughout Washington DC, violates the district’s right to home rule, and places Congress directly in the way of local efforts to ensure the safety of DC residents and others from gun violence. Passage of this erroneously named bill would not preserve the constitutional rights of the people of DC, but rather undermines their right to safe neighborhoods, schools and streets. The Senate must reject this attack on public safety, common sense and DC residents’ right to home rule.”

— **National Council of Jewish Women**, Nancy Ratzan, President
Press Contact: Elissa Froman, 202-296 2588 ext. 3

“The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office strongly urges Senators to oppose H.R. 6842, the Second Amendment Enforcement Act. The sixth commandment says “you shall not kill.” Presbyterian forefather, John Calvin, argued that this commandment not only forbids killing, but also carries with it the obligation to prevent harm, preserve life and build peace in human society. We therefore oppose rescinding the District of Columbia’s common-sense regulations to reduce gun violence: repealing firearm registration requirements, allowing gun trafficking between the District and Virginia or Maryland, and legalizing military-style assault weapons. The District has already taken steps to comply with the recent *DC v Heller* decision, rendering Congressional action unnecessary. The PC(USA) Washington Office calls upon the members of the U.S. Senate to be peacemakers in the midst of violence by opposing this bill.”

— **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office**
Press Contact: Leslie Woods, 202-543-1126

“The Workmen’s Circle/Arbeter Ring, a 108-year-old national organization dedicated to Jewish community and social justice, has long advocated for sensible laws that reduce the violence and destruction caused by guns, based on our commitment to “a more beautiful and better world” (from the Yiddish expression: *a shenere un besere velt*) and the Jewish imperative to preserve life. We are deeply concerned by legislation backed by the National Rifle Association that will force the District of Columbia to repeal most of its regulations concerning gun ownership and purchasing. Using the Supreme Court decision *DC v Heller* as a smoke-screen, such legislation, which would allow stockpiling of assault weapons without age restrictions, undermine federal anti-gun trafficking laws, and prohibit other common-sense, Constitutionally-protected gun laws, puts the residents, workers and visitors to our nation’s capital at increased risk of crime and terrorism. We also strongly believe that such legislation is an infringement of the District’s right of home rule, further limiting the freedom of its inhabitants.”

— **The Workmen’s Circle/Arbeter Ring**, Ann Toback, Executive Director and Robert Kaplan, National President

Press Contact: Adrienne Cooper, 212-889-6800

“Judaism teaches that saving one life is equivalent to saving the entire world. This bill would undermine the District’s common sense, locally inspired firearms regulations – authorizing dangerous weapons on the streets of the Washington, DC. District residents, public officials, foreign dignitaries, and some of our nation’s most sensitive sites may be put in danger. JCPA, and the broader Jewish community, is committed to protecting lives and reducing gun violence through pragmatic and sensible gun safety legislation. This bill would do the exact opposite.”

— **Jewish Council for Public Affairs**, Steve Gutow, Executive Director

Press Contact: Jared Feldman, 202-212-6036

“The Anti-Defamation League opposes H.R. 6842 and urges the Senate to reject this excessive, punitive legislation. ADL has long been an advocate for strong, effective and sensible gun control legislation. Gun violence and the caching of dangerous weapons are commonplace among extremists. If states lose the right to regulate firearm ownership, it would help violent bigots in their efforts to create an America based on hate and intolerance. Like other states, the District of Columbia should be able to enact sensible restrictions designed to make it more difficult for children as well as extremists to acquire and use guns and other dangerous weapons.”

— **Anti-Defamation League**

Press Contact: Myrna Shinbaum, 212-885-7747 or Todd Gutnick, 212-885-7755

“The Friends Committee on National Legislation, a Quaker lobby in the public interest, has long observed that weapons do not provide enduring security – either on the international level or on the local level. Because violence degrades the sacredness of life, we support active non-violent responses to prevent or transform conflict at all levels. The District of Columbia has taken an important step to try to lower the level of lethal violence in the city by removing some of the most dangerous weapons from its streets. We support the District’s efforts to intervene in the cycle of violence in this area, and we strongly support the right of the local DC government to make choices that affect the safety of its citizens. Congress has, and exercises, considerable power over funding issues that affect the District of Columbia, but local safety issues should be left to the authority of those who live here and must deal with the consequences of the laws made on their behalf.”

— **Friends Committee on National Legislation**

Press Contact: Ruth Flower, 202-547-6000 ext. 2524

“Over the years, people have faithfully witnessed to the hurt caused by gun violence. Yet over the years there has been little to no movement toward public policies that would help to stem the tide of gun violence. We have now seen an alarming step backward in the House-passed bill 6842, which has moved to the Senate for consideration. General Synods of the United Church of Christ have continually witnessed to the need for sensible gun laws. In a resolution titled “Guns and Violence,” the 20th UCC General Synod cited a cultural fascination with guns, assault rifles and other weapons designed to take human life that reflect a spiritual sickness, one born of fear, mistrust and the desire to dominate another....” The prophet Jeremiah laments, “would that you knew the things that make for peace.” Sadly, it is evident we haven’t learned.”

— **United Church of Christ**, Sandy Sorensen, Director, Justice and Witness Ministries, Washington Office

Press Contact: Sandy Sorensen, 202-543-1517

“Even though, the District of Columbia government has already begun the process of enacting legislation to allow gun ownership in the District in compliance with the Supreme Court ruling in the case of District of Columbia v. Heller, and despite recent US opinion results where 7 in 10 Americans oppose Congress passing a law to eliminate Washington DC’s local gun laws, Congress has moved to limit the voice of our local government. This bill disrespects local democracy in our nation’s capital by denying locally elected officials the ability to enact the District’s own gun laws and overrides DC’s democratic process by forcing gun laws on DC residents. KRC’s national poll reflects the sentiment that if Congress passes the law, many Americans (by a 2 to 1 margin) believe that Washington will become less safe. This sentiment is shared by Cathy Lanier, Chief of the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department, who also believes that the proposed federal law would put countless residents and people who work in the city at risk.”

— **DC Vote**, Ilir Zherka, Executive Director

Press Contact: Kevin Kiger, 202-462-6000 ext. 12

“As a Jewish organization, founded on the idea that everyone is created equally in the divine image - *b'tzelem elohim* - we are aghast that Congress would consider passage of H.R. 6842. This legislation treats the residents of our nation’s capital not as equals, but as second class citizens. It not only puts people’s lives in danger by allowing more semi-automatic weapons on our streets, but it further disenfranchises the District of Columbia’s residents. We urge the Senate to reject this legislation and allow the District’s democratically elected City Council to set its local laws.”

— **Jews United for Justice**, Jacob Feinspan, Executive Director

Press Contact: Jacob Feinspan, 202-408-1423

“The General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church strongly opposes H.R. 6842, the Second Amendment Enforcement Act, which would open the doors to an uncontrolled and unregulated proliferation of dangerous weapons in the District of Columbia. Rushing this legislation through the Senate without appropriate time to study its implications would set a bad precedent for such an important issue that affects so many innocent citizens. Further, denying the people of the District of Columbia a voting Member in Congress while also imposing gun laws on their city which could potentially increase violence is reprehensible and offends the basic democratic principles of representative government.”

— **United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society**, Jim Winkler, General Secretary

Press Contact: Wayne Rhodes, 202-488-5630