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**Government of the District of Columbia**



**Metropolitan Police Department**

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Testimony of  
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**Chief of Police**

***Hearing on the Impact of Proposed Legislation  
on the District of Columbia's Gun Laws***

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Oversight & Government Reform  
Honorable Henry A. Waxman, Chair

September 9, 2008

U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Waxman, members of the Committee, staff, and guests: my name is Cathy Lanier, and I am the Chief of Police of the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia. Thank you for the opportunity to present this statement on the likely impact of H.R. 6691 on public safety in the Nation's Capital.

To begin with, I would like to briefly share with you what has happened in Washington, DC, since the US Supreme Court issued its decision in *District of Columbia v. Heller*. The District government – both the Executive and the Legislative branches – fully respects the Supreme Court's decision. We have demonstrated that respect by taking quick action to pass legislation and emergency regulations to enable registration of handguns and to ensure that residents already possessing unregistered handguns could register them without fear of criminal liability under District law. The current legislation and regulations are only temporary—valid for 90 and 120 days, respectively—and remain works in progress. The Council of the District of Columbia will be holding a hearing next week to continue to elicit comment from the public and will amend the temporary legislation on September 16<sup>th</sup> and enact permanent legislation soon after. Today's hearing is another important opportunity to hear a variety of viewpoints on this issue.

After the Court ruling, I mobilized my staff to ensure that MPD's 4,000 sworn members and the public were immediately educated about the impact of the ruling. Within hours of the decision, I held a conference call with my Command Staff, and informed the entire force of the content of the decision via a teletype, our internal daily newsletter, and on "Temperature Boards," which are television screens at MPD facilities broadcasting vital information to the force 24-hours a day. This message was reinforced by a training video on the impact of the decision that officers began viewing within days of the ruling. At the same time, I issued a personal message to the public on community list-serves, posted information on our website, and created a 24-hour public hotline. Since the regulations were issued, the Department has registered 23 handguns. We expect this volume to increase now that there is a firearms dealer in the District of Columbia with a Federal Firearms License.

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Turning to H.R. 6691, I have grave concerns about the proposed bill, which would prevent the District of Columbia from registering firearms, or taking many other reasonable and commonly-used steps—taken by states and municipalities across the country—to regulate or limit possession and use of firearms. In layman’s terms, this means that anyone not prohibited by Federal law from possessing a firearm could legally own a small, easily concealed, semi-automatic handgun, or could carry a semi-automatic rifle on the street, either of which could be capable of firing up to 30 rounds of ammunition without reloading.

In my professional opinion, if H.R. 6691 were passed, it would be far more difficult for MPD and Federal law enforcement agencies in the District of Columbia to ensure safety and security in the Nation’s Capital. I say this not just as a police officer, but as someone with extensive experience in homeland security and counterterrorism. As Representative Norton mentioned, after September 11<sup>th</sup>, I served as the Commander of MPD’s Special Operations Division for four years, and I was the first Commanding Officer of the Department’s Office of Homeland Security and Counterterrorism. In that capacity, I worked extensively with a multi-agency taskforce of local and Federal law enforcement agencies to plan and implement security for critical events like the President Inaugural. In short, I have spent a great deal of time working with national experts to analyze terror threats and develop ways to combat them, especially here in the Nation’s capital.

The terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, demonstrated something that we have known for some time: government facilities, dignitaries, and public servants are prime targets for terrorists, both foreign and domestic. Protecting government officials and infrastructure is a challenge for every city in the United States. But in Washington, DC, the likelihood of attack is higher, and the challenges to protecting the city are greater.

The District’s high concentration of iconic structures—such as the national monuments, the White House, and, of course, the Capitol—make it a highly attractive target. The high-profile human targets—from the Nation’s top elected leaders to the more than 400 foreign dignitaries that make official visits to DC each year—are also an obvious and attractive target. In addition, any Federal building or career public servant is a potential target. We have seen this in numerous

attacks—from the Oklahoma City bombing to the 1993 shootings outside of CIA headquarters at Langley. And overseas, even the families of high-profile leaders and public servants are a frequent target of terrorists. I hope that we never see that in the United States, but with the many important U.S. officials and foreign dignitaries here in the city, it is a possibility we need to recognize. Moreover, it is not just well-coordinated terrorist attacks we need to secure the city against. We must also consider the unsophisticated “lone wolf” terrorist, angry at the US Government for a seemingly small matter, such as the size of a tax refund.

The second key vulnerability is due to the sheer volume of secure motorcades traveling in Washington on any given day. Given the daily movements around the city of the President, Vice President, and their families, and the fact that almost 3,000 foreign dignitaries spend time in our city each year—the routes for their movements cannot be shut down, as they are in other cities. As you know from your own districts, when the President and Vice President travel outside of Washington, roads are cleared of all traffic, parked cars, and such, and spectators are often kept behind barricades. We don’t do this in DC because shutting down the routes for every motorcade would make it virtually impossible to navigate much of the city on a continuous basis, and we don’t want the Nation’s capital to take on the character of an armed fortress. This freedom, however, comes with the cost of higher vulnerability—both for the officials and dignitaries, and the general population. In attempted and successful assassinations around the world, the first step in attacking a motorcade is frequently to take out the security detail with semi-automatic and automatic firearms. This forces the motorcade to stop, at which point the terrorist can use explosives to attack the armored vehicles carrying the targeted individual.

In addition to assisting the Secret Service with daily movements of the President and Vice President around the city, and protecting foreign dignitaries, MPD also provides security support for more than 4,000 special events annually. Some of the events are small—a low-profile protest or foot race—and the threat of a terrorist attack at one of these may be relatively low. However, the risks associated with other events are significant. I would ask you to consider, for example, two events familiar to almost every American, and, I believe, extremely important to the city and to the nation—the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration on the National Mall and the Presidential Inauguration. Hundreds of thousands of Americans will be here for these public events. Imagine how difficult

it will be for law enforcement to safeguard the public, not to mention the new President at the Inaugural Parade, if carrying semi-automatic rifles were to suddenly become legal in Washington.

As another example, I'd remind the Committee of the 8,000 delegates who come to Washington from around the world each fall for a meeting of the Boards of Governors of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. The delegates stay at 16 hotels around the city. Even under current law, new challenges to protecting the delegates from terrorist threats arise each year. That risk would grow exponentially if we had to also protect them from a legally-armed "lone wolf" gunman staying in or working at one of their hotels.

If these scenarios scare you—they should. They scare me. We all have an immediate concern for any life threatened or lost in a terrorist event. But here in the Nation's Capital, we must also recognize that any terrorist incident, no matter how small, would garner world-wide attention and could have significant international implications. I am certain that the broader repercussions of an incident in the city is also of grave concern to everyone in this room.

Finally, on a personal level, the thought of a member of the Metropolitan Police Department or any law enforcement officer being injured or killed during such an incident worries me greatly. The safety of the men and women of MPD serving this city and country are my responsibility, and I take this responsibility very seriously. My Department devotes significant resources to trying to prevent such an event. Providing easy access to deadly semi-automatic firearms and high capacity ammunition clips and allowing them to be carried in a large number of places outside the home will make this job much more dangerous and difficult.

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It is clear to me and others engaged every day in securing DC against terrorism that our city is unique. The Federal government already acknowledges that authorizing the general public to carry firearms in certain places is not in the general interest. For instance, as a law enforcement officer, I can carry my gun almost everywhere in the country. I can carry it in schools, on

airplanes, and most public buildings. But ironically, upon entering the Supreme Court to hear the arguments in the *Heller* case, I learned that even the Chief of Police of the District of Columbia cannot carry a gun into the Court. The Federal Government considers the Court building to be so sensitive that, no matter who you are, you cannot wear your firearm in the building.

I would argue that similar caution should apply to the District of Columbia. Supreme Court Justice Scalia, writing the majority decision for the Court, acknowledged that “[L]aws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings” are constitutional.

The District of Columbia, as the seat of the Federal government, with its multitude of critical official and symbolic buildings, monuments, and events, and high-profile public officials traversing its streets every day, is a city filled with “sensitive” places. Our laws should reflect that reality.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you have.

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