

U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Hearing on “VAWA Next Steps: Protecting Women from Gun Violence”
July 30, 2014

I am pleased that the Judiciary Committee is holding this hearing today to explore how we can better protect women from gun violence. The statistics are startling:

- A woman in the United States is 11 times more likely to be killed with a gun than in other first-world countries.
- 45% of women killed with guns are killed by an intimate partner; another 8% are killed by a family member.
- 54% of women who are killed by an intimate partner are killed with a gun.

A significant factor contributing to gun violence against women is our weak gun laws. Federal law prohibits a person from possessing a gun if he has committed a felony or if he has committed a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence against a spouse, live-in girlfriend, or woman with whom he has had a child. However, federal law places no restriction on firearm possession by a person who has committed a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence against a **dating partner** or who has been convicted of a misdemeanor crime of **stalking**. Yet, as of 2008, more women were killed by dating partners than by spouses.

These loopholes in federal law must be addressed. I am pleased that Senator Klobuchar has introduced a bill to prohibit firearm possession by individuals who have committed a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence against a dating partner or who have been convicted of a misdemeanor crime of stalking. We should come together as a Congress and pass Senator Klobuchar’s bill.

A second loophole in federal law allows a person who is subject to a **temporary** restraining order to possess a firearm. The days immediately following the issuance of a temporary restraining order are often the most dangerous for the women protected by the order. However, federal law does not prevent the person subject to such a temporary order from purchasing or continuing to possess a gun.

Senator Blumenthal has introduced a bill to close this loophole. We should pass his bill.

A third loophole in federal law allows a person to avoid a background check if he purchases his gun at a gun show or online. Thus, if you have been convicted of a crime of domestic violence against your spouse or are subject to a long-term restraining order — as Zina Daniel’s estranged husband was — you can easily buy a gun even though you are legally prohibited from possessing one. We must close these loopholes in our background check system.

If we need evidence of the impact that stronger federal gun laws would have on reducing violence against women, we need look no farther than California. Since the early 1990s, California has enacted a series of laws to keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers. For example, California prohibits firearm possession by an individual who is subject to a temporary restraining order or who has committed a violent misdemeanor — including misdemeanor stalking — within the past 10 years. With limited exceptions, California requires background checks on all gun sales, including sales by private individuals. Thus, a domestic abuser or stalker cannot avoid a background check by buying the gun from a private party.

The results speak for themselves. In 1993, there were 329 domestic violence homicides in California. In 2011, there were 147 such homicides. That’s a 55% decline. The number of domestic violence calls to law enforcement where a firearm is present has also decreased, from 2,951 in 1993 to 804 in 2012, a 73% decrease.

I hope that this hearing demonstrates clearly the devastating impact that gun violence has on women. Victims of gun violence are not faceless — they are our mothers and daughters; they are our sisters and grandmothers; they are our aunts and nieces.

I urge my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to come together and strengthen our gun laws to protect our loved ones and other women in our lives from the scourge of gun violence.