



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

April 08, 2013

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I urge you to support legislation that builds a culture of life by promoting policies that reduce gun violence and save people's lives in homes and communities throughout our nation.

The provisions contained within S. 649 are a positive step in the right direction. We hope that this bill will provide Congress a foundation to continue to address the issue of gun violence in society.

As you consider S. 649, we ask you to support policies that:

- Require effective and enforceable universal background checks for all gun purchases; and,
- Establish a vigorous law that makes gun-trafficking a federal crime.

In addition, as you consider amendments to S. 649, support provisions that:

- Limit civilian access to high-capacity ammunition magazines;
- Ban assault weapons.

I also urge you to resist amendments that would expand the use of minimum mandatory sentences as punishment for gun violations. The rising rate of incarceration partially stems from the pervasive use of minimum mandatory sentencing. One-size-fits-all policies are counterproductive, inadequate and replace judges' assessments with rigid formulations. Punishment for its own sake is never justified.

In the USCBB's pastoral statement, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice* (2000), the bishops wrote, "We support measures that control the sale and use of firearms and make them safer (especially efforts that prevent their unsupervised use by children or anyone other than the owner), and we reiterate our call for sensible regulation of handguns."

Sadly, gun violence is too common a reality. Tragic events, such as the recent event in Newton, Connecticut and the violence that occurs daily in our homes and communities, should lead us to answer the call of Pope Francis to "change hatred into love, vengeance into forgiveness, war into peace." Therefore, we urge Congress to act and support policies that promote a culture of life by helping reduce gun violence and save lives.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire
Bishop of Stockton
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development