



The Washington State Catholic Conference (WSCC) represents the Catholic Bishops of Washington State: Archbishop J. Peter Sartain of the Archdiocese of Seattle; Bishop Blase J. Cupich of the Diocese of Spokane; Bishop Joseph J. Tyson of the Diocese of Yakima; and Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

Statement supporting Initiative 594 Background Checks on Gun Sales

Tragic mass shootings have become all too prevalent in our day and reflect a devaluing of human life in our nation. As people of faith, we, the Catholic Bishops of Washington State, are deeply committed to the U.S. Constitution's guarantee of liberty and recognize legitimate recourse to self-defense. However, we cannot ignore the threat to public safety that arises when guns are too easily accessible. Therefore, we support an initiative to the Legislature (Initiative 594), which places some limits on gun sales.

As a consistent voice for reducing violence, the Catholic Church has been a strong advocate for the reasonable regulation of firearms. The Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in its document, "The International Arms Trade" (2006), emphasized the importance of enacting concrete controls on handguns, noting, "Limiting the purchase of such arms would certainly not infringe on the rights of anyone." (*Confronting Armed Violence and Promoting Peace*, USCCB Office of Domestic Social Development, February 2013)

Both state and federal laws regulate the purchase and transfer of firearms. Under these laws, "dealers" are required to have licenses in order to sell guns and must, with few exceptions, conduct a background check to determine whether a purchaser is prohibited by law from possessing a firearm. The purpose of Initiative 594 is to require a background check on the sale or transfer of all firearms other than antique firearms, for both licensed and unlicensed purchasers. We bishops have supported these provisions in the past and now support this initiative's reasonable inclusion of background checks for online sales and sales at gun shows.

These modest conditions for legal purchase of firearms represent a prudent balance between concerns for personal liberty and public safety. In addition to this initiative measure, we also urge support by public and elected officials for policy initiatives to improve access to mental health care for those who may be prone to violence. Such steps would prove both effective and humane, and would receive broad public support as a means of reducing violent crime.

Catholic teaching emphasizes that it is the moral duty of all people to take steps to defend human life and, as pastoral leaders, we have a particular responsibility to participate in efforts that will reduce violence. As our U.S. bishops' 1994 document, *Confronting a Culture of Violence*, states: "We see the loss of lives. We serve the victims. We feel the fear. We must confront this growing culture of violence with a commitment to life, a vision of hope and a call to action." Thus, in concert with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Bishops of Washington State offer the following priorities to assist in public discourse and deliberations regarding gun safety. We support:

1. Measures that place reasonable conditions on the sale and use of firearms
2. Measures that make guns safer
3. Sensible regulation of handguns
4. Efforts intended to curb easy access to deadly weapons, including assault rifles
5. A serious commitment to confront the pervasive role of addiction and mental illness in crime

Our hope is that judicious steps to prevent gun violence will lead to greater respect for human life. We urge Catholics and all people of good will to seek consensus on initiatives that promote public safety while respecting our constitutional guarantees for personal liberty.