



**Background Checks for Gun Sales  
Initiative 594**

Testimony before the House Judiciary Committee  
January 28, 2014

Representative Jinkins and members of the Committee, my name is Eusebio Elizondo. I am the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Seattle. I am here today on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of our state to ask you to support Initiative 594.

The Bishops of Washington State support passage of Initiative 594, a measure placing some limits on gun sales, and urge the approval of this measure. We believe it is the moral duty of all people to take steps to defend human life and that, as pastoral leaders, we have a particular responsibility to participate in efforts that will reduce violence and promote peace. When life is lost and peace disrupted by gun violence, the perspective of pastoral leaders of all faiths is unique within the culture. We are the ones called upon to preside at funerals and to help families in times of tragedy. In the aftermath of senseless acts of violence, we walk with them as they try to put the pieces of their shattered lives back together. We help victims of gun violence and their families confront their understandable fear. We therefore bear a special responsibility to confront the culture of violence with a commitment to life.

The Catholic Church has been a consistent voice for reducing violence. In this context, it has been a strong advocate for reasonable requirements on the sale of firearms. Let us be clear. We recognize that recourse to self-defense is legitimate, but we also recognize that public safety is threatened when guns are too easily accessible.

Measure 594 proposes limited but effective requirements on the sale of guns. Its sole purpose is to expand background checks on those who would sell and purchase firearms. It provides exemptions to collectors of antique and rare guns, licensed dealers and those who possess a license for concealed weapons. We bishops have supported these provisions in the past, and also support the measure's reasonable inclusion of background checks for private online sales and sales at gun shows.

These modest conditions for legal access to firearms represent a prudent balance between concerns for personal liberty and public safety. In addition to this initiative measure, we also take this opportunity to urge the Legislature to consider improving access to mental health services for those who may be prone to violence. We are certain that such steps would have broad public support and prove both effective and humane.

Tragic mass shootings have become all too prevalent in our day and reflect a devaluing of human life in our nation. Our hope is that judicious steps to prevent gun violence will lead to greater respect for human life. We are grateful to the members of this committee for their willingness to engage these important issues. Recognizing the difficulty in reaching consensus on matters affecting both personal liberty and public safety, we urge an affirmative vote for I-594.

Thank you for allowing us to testify on this important matter.