



October 2, 2019

Gun Policy On Trial

On September 13, 2019, Speaker Madigan established the Illinois House Firearm Public Awareness Task Force at my urging, and I was honored to be named Chair of this bipartisan Task Force. The Task Force “will review the issue of gun violence and make recommendations designed to reduce violence”.

We are very interested in the issue of gun violence on the West Side of Chicago because, according to the Illinois Violent Death Reporting System, in 2016, Chicago’s overall adolescent (15-19 years old) firearm homicide rate was about three times the national rate, while Chicago’s black male adolescent firearm rate was nearly 50 times the national rate. Unfortunately, the highest death rates due to firearms in 2016 and 2017 were on the West Side, in Austin and North Lawndale.

But, the issue of gun violence affects everyone in Illinois. In 2016-2017, middle-aged non-Hispanic white women were most impacted by suicide in Illinois, and 15% of these suicides were due to firearms, according to the Illinois Violent Death Reporting System. The issue of firearms, violence, homicide and suicide greatly affects the West Side, but it is not just a West Side issue.

Members of the Illinois House Firearm Public Awareness Task Force have received this same email from many senders over the last few weeks:

State Representative,

I am writing to you as you are a member of the House Firearm Public Awareness Task Force. As a member you have a heavy burden on your shoulders to find a way to end so called "gun violence" that plagues urban areas of Illinois, such as Chicago. However, as you do consider means of curbing violence in Illinois I feel it is important for you to remember that making it harder for lawful gun owners to exercise their rights does nothing to stop the criminals from being violent.

I wish my message to be clear: No New Gun Laws!

As an Illinois voter I am no longer prepared to compromise on my rights. We as a nation of gun owners have been compromising on our rights for nearly 100 years. We have enough data to know that gun control does not work.

Evil people shall do evil things regardless of the laws you place on good people. Disarming good people doesn't make a dangerous person less dangerous. In fact quite the opposite, disarming the good people makes the dangerous people even more dangerous.

In good conscience I will be unable to vote for ANY elected official who violates their oath of office by supporting any gun laws.

After receiving these emails and others and talking with many people throughout Illinois, as Chair of this Task Force, I hope we can all agree that as a society, we want to end unnecessary violence, injuries and deaths due to firearms in all of Illinois, and prevent those people who disregard our laws and don't value the rights afforded by the Second Amendment from having illegal guns. Legislators are elected to reflect the will of the people and to amend and improve outdated laws when it is learned that current laws are not working.

Proposed Hearing Content for the Task Force:

1. Have the Illinois Department of Public Health, the Illinois Violent Death Reporting System, or other entities present updated data about deaths due to firearms, including suicides, homicides and accidents; including the types of guns used in these deaths; whether these guns were obtained legally; and from where they were obtained; gun sales by community; other gun crimes; a report on communities' socio-economic status correlated with gun violence, the number of gun deaths and gun crimes. (If data are not available or are incomplete, this may be an indication that more data collection is required.)
2. Have Behavioral Health professionals testify on the trauma that gun violence inflicts on people, families, communities and the state of Illinois
3. Analysis of the Cash Bail Bond system
4. Public Space Safety discussion
5. Testimony to hear security concerns from universities, school districts, hospitals
6. Testimony from law enforcement
7. Testimony from mayors
8. Concerns from persons opposed to any gun law changes
9. Testimony from organizations for gun law reform
10. Review of current gun laws
11. Current and past bills that tried to address these issues
12. Testimony from victims and their families
13. Higher Education input

Activities: Visit Gun Stores in Illinois and Indiana

Look at a Midwest multi-state partnership to prevent gun-related violence - By working cooperatively, participating states are making an effort to tackle issues related to the epidemic of gun violence even if Congress and the president fail to take federal action. We can take action that will directly confront the threat of gun violence and reduce the toll it takes on our communities. We can work with higher education to help chair the Midwest Multi-state Firearm Task Force Research Consortium, the multi-disciplinary data-collection group tasked with producing recommendations for reducing gun violence.

1. Trace and Intercept illegal guns in the region

2. Intelligence gathering, information sharing and response efforts related to gun violence
3. Share information about individuals who are prohibited from purchasing or possessing a firearm within each state.
4. Gun sales

It is crucial to identify at-risk youth early on, provide them with consistent supports, and encourage schools to work more closely with law enforcement and others to keep those youth from either falling prey to, or perpetrating, gun violence.

The Task Force will present its findings to all branches of government and offer opinions to municipalities, and the Task Force will likely draft a comprehensive, statewide omnibus bill on firearms. Please contact me at repford@lashawnford.com with your ideas and suggestions for the Task Force.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District