

AB 760 (DICKINSON)

AMMUNITION TAX : SCHOOL BASED EARLY MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION

Bill Summary:

AB 760 would impose a 5 cent (\$0.05) tax on each munition sold at retail in the state, and upon each munition purchased out of state or on the Internet, but intended for use in California. Further, the bill would dedicate the revenue collected from this tax to the School-Based Early Mental Health Intervention and Prevention Services for Children grant program which has existed since 1991.

Problem:

Gun violence is disturbingly prevalent in our nation and state. Reams of statistics demonstrate how common an act of gun violence has become. According to the FBI, California had the highest number of total gun deaths out of any state last year, accounting for 68% of all gun murders in the United States. Approximately 5700 people were either hospitalized or killed due to guns in California during 2011. More guns are being sold each year - over 600,000 in California last year. Bullet sales nationwide total 9 to 10 billion annually. In California, bullet sales may be as high as 1.2 billion.

There is some evidence that people suffering from mental illness commit more violent acts than those who are not so afflicted (16% vs. 7%). However, mental health professionals say there is no definitive way to identify mentally ill individuals that are prone to violence vs. those who are not. But we do know that many recent mass shootings in places like Arizona, Connecticut and Colorado, have been perpetrated by people who likely suffer from serious mental illness.

Debate rages over who should have guns and who should not, and how guns should or should not be regulated. While that debate over our Second Amendment Right may continue into the foreseeable future, most parties to the debate, including many pro-gun advocates, agree that mentally ill people should not be allowed to own a weapon. In fact, California law restricts gun ownership by people who have been admitted to a mental health facility or found to be a threat to themselves or others by a court of law. But making the diagnosis of mental illness prior to an incident that commits them to a treatment facility or subject to adjudication, and restricting their right to own a

gun, is difficult. Therefore, the best way to reduce the incidence of shootings committed by mentally ill people may be to simply reduce the incidence of mental illness in our state altogether.

This Bill:

AB 760 seeks to reduce the incidence of mental illness by re-funding a small and successful state matching grant program addressing mild to moderate forms of mental illness in young children. The program, known as the School-Based Early Mental Health Intervention and Prevention Services for Children program (EMHI), has been operating since its enactment in 1991. The program provides screening and prevention services to K -3 grade students who exhibit school adjustment difficulties. Funding for the program was blue-penciled in the 2012-13 Budget.

According to the Dept. of Health Care Services, the systematic early detection and screening, combined with prompt intervention, as offered by EMHI, has been effective in reducing later adjustment difficulties in 79% of the students served by the program. Reducing student adjustment problems at an earlier age may very well reduce violent behavior by students later on in their academic careers.

According to researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health, taxation of firearms and ammunition is not punitive, but simply produces a more valid representation in the purchase price of the true societal costs of purchasing firearms or ammunition. For example, some research has pegged the annual average societal cost of each gun owned at \$600, based on empirical data of assault-related gunshot injuries and homicides. The researchers conclude that existing federal and local firearms and ammunition taxes are neither comprehensive nor representative of the true external costs of gun ownership. Therefore, taxation of ammunition and/or firearms can provide a stable source of revenue to meaningfully target gun violence prevention such as assisting in the recognition of at-risk individuals, including those who may suffer from mental illness, and which could make them prone towards committing violence with a deadly weapon. Screening and treating mentally ill people who may be prone towards violence with a deadly weapon in

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turn would reduce some of the external costs created by guns and ammunition in the first place.

AB 760 is not primarily intended to reduce the consumption and use of ammunition, although imposing a tax on the sale of ammunition may have that effect. Rather, the bill is intended to help fund a program which reduces the number of people who suffer from mild or moderate forms of mental illness affecting their emotional condition and behavior, and, which left untreated, may increase their propensity to commit a violent act, possibly with a gun, resulting in tragic consequences.

In the final analysis, the protection of Second Amendment Rights may very well limit our ability to regulate the purchase and ownership of guns and ammunition. But one cost of protecting that Right, is helping reduce gun violence by paying for programs that reduce underlying causes which lead to people using guns and ammunition in a violent way. California's EMHI program is an effective tool in that regard, and merits the financial support of gun owners through their purchase of ammunition.

Support:

*Children Now; *California Council of Community Mental Health Agencies; *Blue Skies for Children; *Time For Kids; *Lucille Packard Children's Hospital, Stanford University Medical Center; *California Pan-Ethnic Health Network; *Autism Health Insurance Project; *Los Angeles Trust for Children; * The Children's Partnership; *Coalition Against Gun Violence; *Children's Defense Fund; *California School Health Centers Association.; * Mental Health America of California; *California Black Health Network; *Oakland Schools Foundation; *United Advocates for Children and Families; *Public Profit; *American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy; *Early Edge California; *California Immigrant Policy Center; *City of Sacramento; *The Los Angeles Education Foundation

Opposition: *Safari Club International; *Outdoor Sportsman Coalition of California; National Shooting Sports Foundation; *The California Sportsman Lobby; *Crossroads of the West; *California Association of Firearms Retailers; *BOE Member George Runner; *Shasta County Sherriff, Tom

Bosenko; *Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Assn;
*California Outdoor Heritage Alliance;

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