

Background Checks on Gun Sales in Washington State and Support of I-594, an Initiative to the Legislature

WHEREAS gun injuries and deaths in Washington State are a significant public health problem, with approximately 600 people killed by guns each year over the past decade, and in 2010 more people in Washington State were killed by guns (609) than in traffic accidents (554); and

WHEREAS over 2.1 million firearm-purchase applications have been denied since 1994 because of federal criminal background checks on gun sales through licensed dealers, as required by the Brady Law, but up to 40% of firearm purchases are between private parties and therefore not subject to such background checks; and

WHEREAS the risk of new criminal activity is increased among gun users with a prior criminal history; inmate surveys have shown that at least 80% of the firearms that inmates used in their crimes were obtained in private transfers; and more than 40% of homicide offenders and other inmates incarcerated for firearm-related offenses were prohibited from purchasing firearms at the time they acquired them; and

WHEREAS a published study (JAMA 2001; 285:1019-1026) found that the denial of handgun purchases to people in California who had previously committed violent misdemeanors was associated with a decrease in the risk of their being arrested for new crimes involving guns and/or violence; and

WHEREAS fifteen states and the District of Columbia have enacted laws requiring background checks for all firearm purchases or handgun purchases, but Washington state has not; and

WHEREAS the current King County Democratic platform urges that “[g]un-sale background checks and waiting periods ... be made sufficiently effective, and applicable to gun shows and other transactions, to keep guns out of the hands of felons, mentally unstable persons, and others likely to misuse or allow the misuse of such weapons”; and

WHEREAS Initiative 594 is an initiative to the Washington State legislature that (1) would apply, to all gun sales and transfers, with specific exceptions, the background-check requirements currently used for gun sales by licensed dealers, (2) would require that those checks be conducted through licensed dealers, and (3) is, for the foreseeable future, the only realistic path to enact this policy in Washington State; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we support Initiative 594 and urge our members and other public-spirited citizens to assist in collecting signatures in order to bring about action on this vitally important matter.

Adopted September 24, 2013 by the King County Democratic Central Committee

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