



For Immediate Release
April 20, 2011

Contact: Deanne Benos
(773) 960-8228
Caroline Brewer
(202)-469-9846
Brady Campaign to
Prevent Gun Violence

CHICAGO OFFICE

223 West Jackson Boulevard
Suite 802
Chicago, Illinois 60606
312.341.0939
312.341.9770 (fax)

www.ichv.org

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Shocking Revelations from State Police on Dangerous Gaps in Mental Health Records *Poor Reporting Poses Even Greater Public Safety Concerns for Pending Concealed Carry Legislation*

(Chicago, IL, April 20, 2011) – The Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence (ICHV) and Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence (Brady Campaign) brought together state legislators, gun violence victims and law enforcement at the Thompson Center today to send an urgent plea to state lawmakers to oppose HB 148, a dangerous bill that would potentially allow mentally ill individuals to carry guns in public places. Coinciding with the anniversaries of the Virginia Tech and Columbine massacres, the press event shared the results of a legislative hearing last week where the Illinois State Police (ISP) revealed shocking gaps in checking mental health records before issuing gun permits. This growing hole in the safety net was referred to as a “ticking time bomb” that could result in more lives, families and communities shattered by gun violence.

Last week, the Illinois House Human Services Appropriation Committee held a hearing on the status of missing mental health records in the system to prevent prohibited individuals from obtaining Firearm Owner’s Identification (FOID) cards. The hearing focused on reports issued by the ISP which indicated there is insufficient reporting of mental health records that should prohibit an individual from obtaining a FOID card, gaps which put Illinois lives at risk, specifically referencing both the Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University (NIU) shootings. Of even greater concern to legislators was the fact that ISP officials stated that they intended to use the FOID system to approved permits for individuals to carry loaded, concealed guns – should HB 148 be passed by the legislature.

At the state level, the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS), County Courts and ISP operate systems to collect and report mental health data before issuing FOID cards. According to the ISP report and testimony at the hearing, there are many dangerous gaps in the reporting of these records: Only 183 of 130,000 licensed clinicians have registered with DHS, and very few of the 102 county courts have reported individuals adjudicated mentally defective to the state system. Furthermore, it was revealed that the ISP should have reported an estimated 120,000 mental health records to the FBI National Instant Background Check System (NICS) to prevent dangerously mentally ill persons from obtaining guns over state lines, but has only reported 5,000. According to the ISP, even with limitless funds, it would take a minimum of two years to fix the system.

At the hearing, an October 2009 Illinois State Police Report entitled “Reducing Firearms Violence Through Enhanced Mental Health & Systemic Data Reporting: Saving Lives, Saving State Budget Dollars, Risk Avoidance” was distributed.



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Referencing the FOID background check system as a “ticking time bomb,” the report stated that it created “exposure to lawsuits that will arise when a prohibited purchaser . . . obtains or keeps a gun they should not have and commits assaults and or murders.”

“The public safety implications of these gaps in the system are deeply disturbing,” said Illinois State Representative Ann Williams, who attended the hearing. “I was particularly concerned when I heard the Illinois State Police Firearms Bureau Chief state that the gaps in the background check system result in “sleepless nights,” Given the revelations from the hearing, I believe it would be highly irresponsible, if not immoral, for the legislature to approve HB 148 which could put loaded, concealed weapons in the hands of dangerous individuals and allow them to carry them in most public places, such as trains, buses, campuses and street fairs.”

The proposed law, as currently written, does not require law enforcement to conduct an extensive background check of state and federal mental health records and would require county sheriffs to issue a permit to carry loaded, concealed guns in most public places to any person meeting certain minimum qualifications, with limited discretion from law enforcement.

The month of April commemorates the anniversary of two of our nation’s worst mass shootings, Columbine High School in 1999, and more recently, Virginia Tech in 2007, where a student with serious mental illness killed 32 students and professors and wounded 17 others before killing himself. Several victims and their families from these incidents and others will be at the press conference.

"I'm in Illinois today because there are dangerous gaps in Illinois' mental health records system. I'm in Illinois today because there's a dangerous proposal in Illinois that would push more loaded concealed guns into more public places in Illinois," said Colin Goddard, Assistant Director of Legislative Affairs for the Brady Campaign, and a survivor of the Virginia Tech Campus shooting. "I know from personal experience that the policies and practices of the state and mental health practitioners have real-life consequences. I'm here to urge the legislators and residents of this great state to choose wisely. Don't make it easier for another Virginia Tech to happen here. Don't make it easier for someone like Cho to legally get a gun and turn a campus, a community, a state, and our nation upside-down. The Brady Campaign and I urge the legislature and Gov. Quinn to reject House Bill 148."

“As we stand here commemorating the anniversaries of the Colombine School and Virginia Tech shootings, we are reminded of the tragic toll gun violence has take on our communities. Now is not the time to weaken our state’s gun laws,” said Colleen Daley, Executive Director of ICHV. “This bill is a terrible idea and I cannot imagine that the legislature would want to take responsibility should any of these permits – allowing individuals to carry loaded, concealed guns in most public places – end up in the wrong hands. Based on the Illinois State Police testimony last week, this is a disturbingly real risk.”

At the hearing, Illinois State Police Firearms Bureau Chief, John Coffman, stated that he had concerns about the dangerous gaps in the FOID system regarding poor mental health record reporting, and that those gaps remain a concern should the concealed carry legislation pass. “We are very concerned about the existence of some gaps and the potential tragedy that could occur as a result. We are all aware of what’s happened



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around the country, and in the aftermath the scrutiny that's given to those situations, and who had what information and when and what they do with it."

One of the leading participants in the development of the Illinois State Police report was Eliot Fineman, President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Gun Victims Action Council, who lost his son to gun violence committed by a mentally ill individual.

"I want to tell members of the General Assembly, the Governor and the public that there are serious, potentially lethal problems in our system," said a statement issued by Fineman, who could not attend the hearing. "I agree with the testimony of Illinois State Police officials, when he stated that the gaps in the system result in sleepless nights for them."

In addition to the ISP reports, members of the media will also be provided with copies of recent polling data conducted by The Mellman Group, which indicates that two of out of three Illinois voters (65%) are opposed to allowing individuals to carry loaded, concealed weapons.

"When my colleagues consider the issue of legislation that would allow individuals to carry loaded, concealed guns in most public places, we need to look at the facts. The facts are that 65 percent of Illinois residents oppose it. The facts are that a recent report from the Violence Policy Center indicates that these types of laws in other states are resulting in putting guns into the hands of individuals that are killing people, killing police officers. The facts are that we have been reminded today of the risks associated with poor mental health record reporting, and our own Illinois State Police officials have validated our concerns," said State Senator Dan Kotowski, one of the leading members that fought for passage of legislation to improve mental health record reporting. "Instead of focusing on weakening our gun laws, we should be fighting to strengthen them. For example, why does anyone need a high capacity magazine?"

The Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence (ICHV) is the oldest and largest statewide organization in the U.S. working to prevent the devastation caused by firearms. Founded in 1975 by four suburban Chicago women concerned about the tragic consequences of handgun proliferation and availability, ICHV works on a variety of fronts to educate, raise public awareness, and build coalitions to enact change in laws and behavior. For 35 years, ICHV has been a leader among state gun violence prevention groups. For more information, visit www.ichv.org.

As the nation's largest, non-partisan, grassroots organization leading the fight to prevent gun violence, the Brady Campaign, with its dedicated network of Million Mom March Chapters, works to enact and enforce sensible gun laws, regulations and public policies. The Brady Campaign is devoted to creating an America free from gun violence, where all Americans are safe at home, at school, at work, and in our communities. For more information, visit www.bradiycampaign.org.

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