

Keep It Simple, Senators

Bill C-71 puts public safety at risk  
by ignoring the KISS principle

A Presentation to  
the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence

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Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and members of the committee. I appreciate this opportunity to appear before you.

I am Gary Mauser, professor emeritus at Simon Fraser University. As part of my academic duties, I have published in criminology and political science journals for over 30 years. My presentation is based on the best available statistics, not heart-rending anecdotes.

Bill C-71 is a Rube Goldberg contraption that assumes – without evidence – that multiplying regulations will reduce criminal violence.

The government has “concerns” but produces no evidence to support claims that this bill will help to resolve problems.

Bill C-71 ignores the vast bulk of violent crime to focus myopically on gun crime (a gun is used in less than one percent of violent crimes).

The problem is criminal violence, not guns. Knives are used in as many murders as are firearms.

By targeting guns, Bill C-71 ignores the factors driving criminal violence – social problems, criminal motives and mental health.

Worse. Confusing licenced firearms owners with criminals, Bill C-71 misses the target completely. At least one-million Canadians own guns illegally; they are the source of most gun crime.

I ask the Senate to exercise sober second thought.

Bill C-71 will not improve public safety and should be withdrawn. My criticisms will focus on flaws where my expertise may offer some value.

Bill C-71 focuses on the law-abiding Canadians who carry a Possession and Acquisition Licence (a PAL). They have been vetted by the RCMP and are monitored daily.

Just how big a threat are PAL holders?

Even moose kill more people annually than do PAL holders.

At least ten times as many people die each year due to medical mistakes in Canada than PAL holders are accused of killing (138 vs. 12-13).

The worst mass murder in Canada did not involve a firearm, it was an arson attack in Montreal. Gasoline remains readily available.

Suicide. Even where guns are readily available, hanging remains, by far, the most preferred method.

Bill C-71 neglects the overwhelmingly positive contribution PAL holders make to Canada – to sport, conservation, culture. We are the beating heart of Canada.

Millions of Canadians own guns legally; most are hunters, who are the mainstay of wildlife conservation. Hunting has considerable economic benefits.

My presentation will show the government cannot provide evidence to justify Bill C-71.

No convincing evidence exists that show PAL holders threaten public safety.

No evidence has been produced that PAL holders are a major source of “crime guns.”

Abuses of the current Authorization To Transport restricted firearms (ATT) system are rare.

**First, PAL holders have a lower homicide rate than other Canadians.**

The numbers of PAL holders accused of homicide are so small that Statistics Canada is concerned about reliability.

Between 13 and 20 PAL holders are suspected or accused of homicide annually (1997-2016). Out of 2 million PAL holders. Obviously not all suspects are accused; fewer still are convicted.

Or out of about 200 firearm homicides. StatsCan considers such small numbers too unreliable to report.

These miniscule numbers indicate that PAL holders are much less apt to commit murder than other Canadians. As Senator Pratte has demonstrated, the lion’s share of firearm homicide is committed by criminals. (Whether it’s 93% or 88% remains a matter of dispute).

These numbers are so tiny that both Statistics Canada and the police routinely ignore PAL holders when reporting crime.

In 2017, 2/3 homicide accused (and 53% of victims) have a criminal record.

**Second, no methodologically valid study has been able to find evidence that tighter screening of gun owners, even gun bans, have reduced general homicide rates or spousal homicide rates.**

In 1995, the Canadian government banned over one-half of all legally registered handguns. Not only have gang killings continued to increase since then, handguns remain the murder weapon of choice for gangsters.

Methodology counts. Research has not been able to link the level of public gun ownership with either criminal violence or suicide rates.

As may be obvious to advocates, once the scientific method is abandoned, data can be tortured to yield whatever results desired. This is routine for public health activists.

Criminologists think demography is driving the decline in criminal violence. Not gun laws.

**Third, Bill C-71 falsely assumes criminals get their guns from lawful domestic sources.**

The government claims the source of crime guns has changed; but has failed to produce evidence. Support is buried in “confidential” police reports. Thanks to Dennis Young and to MP Bob Zimmer, we found the only change was in the definition of “crime guns.”

According to Statistics Canada data, PAL holders cannot be a major source of guns used in homicide. Too much information is missing. A firearm was recovered in 38% of firearm homicides and an accused was identified in 57% (2005-2017). PAL holders are easily identified.

At the height of the long-gun registry, just 4% could have been stolen or a “straw purchase.”

In total, 9% of firearms involved in homicides were registered (135 out of the 1,485 firearms homicide from 2003 to 2010).

5%, of these were registered to the accused,  
leaving 4% unaccounted for.

According to the RCMP, on average of 641 restricted firearms are stolen annually (2000-2015).

This is approximately 0.03% of total legally registered firearms.

Over 1,000 firearms have been lost or stolen from the police and military. Neither the RCMP nor StatsCan keeps track of stolen guns used in violent crime. Nor does the RCMP know how many guns were stolen from PAL holders.

Estimates suggest that between 1% - 3% of stolen firearms are subsequently used in a violent crime (In Australia).

Some police officials admit smuggling is the main source of crime guns.

“The majority of our crime guns are smuggled in from the US,”  
Chris Lewis, retired commissioner,  
Ontario Provincial Police (said Jan. 16)

**Fourth, the government cannot present solid evidence to support concerns about issuing automatic Authorizations To Transport firearms (ATTs) to PAL holders.**

ATI (Access to Information) requests have found virtually no abuses. Under 0.05%.

992,139 ATTs issued [2008 to 2017],  
just 17 were Refused and 471 were Revoked.

For this we need new legislation?

**Fifth, requiring additional ATTs diverts scarce police resources.**

Internal audits show serious backlogs in data processing that deny both judges and CFOs timely access to vital information.

Bill C-71 could even endanger public safety.

How much would this cost? An Ontario report suggests that annual costs for issuing ATTs would quadruple.

These are monies the RCMP could use more effectively.  
Requiring additional ATTs to be issued merely inflates the bureaucracy.

Summing up:

Bill C-71 is fundamentally misguided. Gun owners are a public safety resource not a threat.

Bureaucratic busy work diverts scarce police resources away from programs that are more effective in dealing with violent criminals.

Inflating the already bulging federal firearms bureaucracy will not solve the real problems facing youth in gang-infested corners of Canada or women in abusive relationships.

Bill C-71 is theatre; it does not contribute to public safety.

Bill C-71 looks suspiciously like a red herring.

I respectfully ask the Senate to reject Bill C-71—exercising the sober second thought for which you are well regarded.

Thank you.