

Prosecutors: Keep guns from hands of people with history of violence

Written by

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Senator Ron Latz (DFL-St. Louis Park), Representative John Lesch (DFL-St. Paul) and Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman announced the introduction of legislation to allow prosecutors to crack down on those dangerous people who already have committed serious crimes and still possess a gun. "We need to focus on legislation that helps our prosecutors keep guns out of the hands of people known to have a violent past," said Sen. Latz. "These proposals will have a large impact on known offenders and their ability to purchase another weapon."

At a news conference Thursday morning, (Jan. 31) Sen. Latz and Rep. Lesch said the package of proposals developed by Freeman and supported by Minnesota County Attorneys Association will be effective in cutting gun violence. Among other changes, the legislation will keep guns away from convicted felony domestic violence offenders by defining it as a "crime of violence" and making it an automatic prison term if they later possess a firearm.

For example, George Gant, 31, was convicted in June of breaking into his ex-girlfriend's Bloomington home, twisting her neck so violently she thought it would snap, then hit her hard, causing her to black out. When he gets out of prison, under the current law, he could immediately own a gun without restrictions. This bill would prohibit him from owning a firearm.

"This bill is a collaborative effort to keep guns away from convicted criminals, children and those whom a court has ordered civilly committed," said Rep. Lesch. "It is a common-sense approach by law enforcement to keep our neighborhoods safe."

The legislation will be one piece of a larger discussion at the Capitol for ways to reduce gun violence. Gun violence has been a hot topic of discussion and legislators will continue to look for common sense solutions to this growing problem.

"This package of practical laws will allow prosecutors throughout the state to get guns out of the hands of people who already have been convicted of crimes of violence," Freeman said. "It will provide additional tools to put felons back in prison if they are found with a gun or ammunition."

The five key provisions in the bill include:

- Keeping guns away from convicted felony domestic violence offenders by defining it as a

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crime of violence. If the convict possesses a gun again, he would face up to five years in prison.

- Keeping guns away from juvenile offenders by allowing them to be tried in adult court the second time they are caught with a gun. Currently, they are tried in juvenile court no matter how many times authorities arrest them with a gun illegally.
- Keeping ammunition away from criminals by prohibiting felons from possessing ammunition just as they are prohibited from possessing guns.
- Limiting access to guns by people with mental illness by prohibiting those who have been found to be mentally ill from possessing guns, even if their commitment order is put on hold. Currently, only those ordered to a state facility are prohibited from having firearms.
- Stopping the knowing transfer of guns to criminals by making it a crime for another person to intentionally help a felon obtain a gun.

The common-sense changes contained in the bill will provide county attorneys with more tools to address gun violence and keep our children and communities safe without affecting responsible gun-owners.