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Bill that would strip firearms from domestic abusers wins support in Chesco

Legislation to strip firearms from domestic abusers backed

By Michael Rellahan, Daily Local News

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WEST CHESTER >> A state bill meant to prevent episodes of domestic violence involving the use of a gun by those convicted of criminal offenses and supervised by protective orders drew support Thursday from activists, local leaders and members of the Chester County law enforcement community.

In March, state Sen. Tom Killion, R-9, of Middletown, Delaware County, whose district covers portions of the eastern part of Chester County, introduced legislation that would require all defendants with final protection-from-abuse orders against them to relinquish their guns, either to

a law enforcement agency or a licensed firearms dealer. They could no longer hand over firearms to a relative or friend, as allowed under the current law.

The legislation hasn't come up for a hearing or votes yet in the Republican-controlled General Assembly, so those who support the legislation have gone on the offensive to urge residents to call their legislators and demand action.

Speakers at the event organized by Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, a national group aimed at stopping gun violence, included West Chester Mayor Jordan Norley; county Deputy District Attorney Michelle Frei; West Pikeland Police Chief Shane Clark, head of the Police Chiefs Association of Chester County; and Dolly Weideman-Scott, head of the Domestic Violence Center of Chester County.

Also speaking was West Whiteland resident Laura Fletcher, a member of the organization and volunteer activist.

Norley studied the issues surrounding SB 501 extensively before supporting it, said Marybeth Christiansen, the legislative lead for Moms Demand Action, making his endorsement all the more significant.

"My first responsibility is the safety of our residents, and that of our first responders," Norley said in his remarks, delivered at the county Justice Center. "Tragically, domestic violence has become all too prevalent in our communities. We know this legislation can save lives."

Frei, who leads the D.A.'s Office's efforts against domestic violence and teaches courses in the subject to local police, noted the danger that those domestic abusers who retain their guns pose to local and state police. She pointed to the death of state Trooper Landon Weaver in December as he responded to a domestic violence call involving a man who had violated a protection from abuse (PFA) order, but who kept his guns.

"He should not have even had a firearm at all," Frei said of the accused gunman. "By removing weapons from an offender we are able to take away their easiest weapon of choice."

According to research from Everytown for Gun Safety, only 14 percent of final protection from abuse orders issued in the state from 2011 to 2015 required firearms to be turned in and that 82 percent of likely voters in the state support a ban on firearms to anyone convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence.

"Fourteen percent is not keeping us safe," said Fletcher, who wore a button commemorating 2-year-old Michael Ayers, who was shot and killed by his father during a custody dispute involving a PFA.

State Sen. Tom McGarrigle, R-26 of Springfield, whose district covers a portion of eastern Chester County, is a co-sponsor of the "common-sense" bill, as is state Sen. Andrew Dinniman, D-19, of West Whiteland.

"When we can identify a way to reduce the potential for this violence and do so within the parameters of the constitution, I believe we should do so," said McGarrigle at a similar event in Media on Wednesday. "Requiring the relinquishing of firearms ... reduces the risk of violence for everyone involved: the victim; the police; and even the offender. But it's not merely a solution if they're transferred to a friend or a neighbor as the current law allows.

"The intent of the law is to remove firearms from a volatile situation, not merely moving them from a specific location."

Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America is a grassroots movement of American mothers fighting for public safety measures that respect the Second Amendment and protect people from gun violence. Along with Mayors Against Illegal Guns and the Everytown Survivor Network, it is part of Everytown for Gun Safety, the largest gun violence prevention organization in the country with more than three million members and more than 140,000 donors.

Everytown is the largest gun violence prevention organization in the country with more than three million supporters and more than 140,000 donors including moms, mayors, survivors, and everyday Americans who are fighting for public safety measures that respect the Second Amendment and help save lives. At the core of Everytown are Mayors Against Illegal Guns, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America and the Everytown Survivor Network

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