

# Poly Remembers

## Students and Graduates of Polytechnique for gun control



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### LETTER SENT TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

November 24, 2017

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT  
HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OTTAWA

#### **Subject: Strengthening the Firearms Act**

MR/MRS

Poly Remembers (or PolySeSouvient) consists of students and graduates of the École Polytechnique as well as families and loved ones of the victims of the December 6, 1989 tragedy that are calling for better gun control. We also collaborate with other families who have lost loved ones or been injured in shootings, namely at Dawson College and the Quebec Mosque.

Our mission is simple: to reduce the number of accidents, suicides, homicides, threats and other crimes carried out with firearms. Having witnessed or experienced the suffering that a firearm in the wrong hands can cause, we feel it is our duty to speak up in the gun control debate to defend every person's right to life and security. We are motivated by our firm determination to prevent other families from experiencing the pain and suffering caused by avoidable tragedies.

Although we are not safety experts, we offer a very important perspective, that of the victims. In addition, our positions are based on the research and opinions of the real experts in public safety: police officers, suicide-prevention experts and people working to prevent domestic violence.

In this letter we would like to present to you our expectations relating to changes to the *Firearms Act*, including measures that were in the Liberal Party's election platform, which should be tabled before the end of the year, according to the recent statement<sup>1</sup> by the Minister of Public Safety.

But before we get to specific measures, we must point out some facts about the risks associated with firearms and about the impact of past interventions, the adoption of which were in part the result of the efforts of the families affected by the tragedies at the École Polytechnique, Dawson College and Concordia University.

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<sup>1</sup> CPAC, October 3, 2017. [http://polysesouvient.ca/images/TV\\_17\\_10\\_03\\_Scrum\\_RalphGoodale.ogv](http://polysesouvient.ca/images/TV_17_10_03_Scrum_RalphGoodale.ogv)

### *Risks associated with firearms*

Firearms are designed for killing. While firearms on their own do not kill, they make it easier and more efficient to kill. *Guns don't kill people; people with guns kill people.* Owning a gun is not a right but a privilege, and this privilege must be governed by solid rules and must be accompanied by a range of responsibilities.

The simple fact that a firearm is present in a home increases the risks of violence and intimidation for the women and children who live there.<sup>2</sup> It triples the likelihood of homicide<sup>3</sup> and multiplies the risk of suicide by five.<sup>4</sup> Although we often hear that a determined person will find a way to commit suicide, with or without a gun, research shows that access to firearms is a determining factor. For example, although women are 3 to 4 times more likely to *attempt* suicide, men are more likely to *accomplish* the act because they choose more lethal methods — such as guns.<sup>5</sup>

Even though assault weapons are not often used in violent crimes, they nevertheless represent unreasonable and enormous risks for the entire population, allowing someone who wishes to do harm the power to kill dozens of people in mere minutes, simply with the pressure on a trigger. These weapons are also able to pierce the armour and other protective equipment used by the police. The Polytechnique massacre and other shootings of police officers clearly demonstrate the enormous destructive potential associated with civilian access to these weapons.

Canadians have been horrified by the number of mass shootings south of the border in recent weeks. However, by looking more closely at the weapons that were used to destroy so many lives, we can see that most of the weapons used in such acts of terror are *legal to possess in Canada*:

- **Tehama, Californie, November 14, 2017**: 5 dead and 10 wounded in various locations, including a 5-minute barrage against a primary school which the killer, fortunately, was unable to enter. Kevin Neal was carrying four weapons; two handguns and two AR-15 semi-automatic rifles (restricted weapons in Canada).



The AR-15 is said to be the weapon of choice for mass shooters in the United States (**Newtown, Connecticut**, 2012: 26 dead, including 20 children under 7; **Aurora, Colorado**, 2012: 12 dead; **San Bernardino, California**, 2015: 14 dead) and was also used in 1996 at **Port Arthur, Australia**, causing 35 deaths and leading to greater firearms control.

<sup>2</sup> **Deborah Doherty, Jennie Hornosty**, *Exploring the Links: Firearms, Family Violence and Animal Abuse in Rural Communities*, 2008. [http://guncontrol.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Family\\_Violence\\_Firearms\\_Animal\\_Abuse.pdf](http://guncontrol.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Family_Violence_Firearms_Animal_Abuse.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> "Keeping a gun in the home was strongly and independently associated with an increased risk of homicide (adjusted odds ratio, 2.7)", <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJM199310073291506>

<sup>4</sup> "The presence of one or more guns in the home was found to be associated with an increased risk of suicide (adjusted odds ratio, 4.8)". **Arthur L. Kellermann, Frederick P. Rivara et al.**, "Suicide in the Home in Relation to Gun Ownership", *New England Journal of Medicine*, 1992; 327:467-472. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/1308093>

<sup>5</sup> "Although men are more likely to die by suicide, females are 3-4 times more likely to attempt to end their lives. In addition, women are hospitalized 1.5 times more often than males for suicide related behaviors. This discrepancy may be due to the fact that females tend to use less immediately lethal methods." **Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention**, *Suicide in Canada*. <https://www.suicideprevention.ca/understanding/suicide-in-canada/>

- **Utherland Springs, Texas, November 5, 2017** : 26 dead and 20 wounded; all the victims, aged 5 to 72, were inside a Baptist church. Devin Patrick Kelley used a gun of the AR-15 type, a **Ruger AR-556** semi-automatic rifle (a restricted weapon in Canada<sup>6</sup>);
- **Las Vegas, October 1, 2017** : The largest mass shooting in the United States: 58 people killed and over 500 wounded when Stephen Paddock opened fire on the crowd at a music festival. The killer had an arsenal of some 25 guns, including many assault weapons, *most of which are legal in Canada* (e.g. **DDM4** – a restricted weapon in Canada<sup>7</sup>).
- The second largest mass shooting in the United States was the massacre at a dance club in **Orlando, Florida** on June 12, 2016, where 49 people were killed and 28 wounded. Omar Mateen was in possession of a **SIG Sauer MCX**, a weapon that is also legal in Canada as a restricted weapon<sup>8</sup>.



**DDMA : legal in Canada**



**Sig Sauer MCX :  
legal in Canada**

Despite the obvious risks associated with assault weapons and despite the election promise to rid our streets of these weapons, the RCMP continues to approve new models for sale on the Canadian market,<sup>9</sup> including non-restricted versions<sup>10</sup> — meaning that they are not registered, nobody knows who owns them, and no verification of the validity of a buyer's possession permit is required.

**KEL-TEC RDB : →  
Legal in Canada**

**Approved by the RCMP in  
May 2017 as a  
non restricted  
weapon**



<sup>6</sup> Internet advertising, seen Nov. 16 2017, <http://gonefishinshop.com/product/ruger-ar-556-5-56-nato-rifle-16-restricted/>

<sup>7</sup> Internet advertising, seen Nov. 16 2017, <https://www.gotenda.com/shop/firearms/restricted-rifles/daniel-defense-m4-v7-pro-5-56-nato-18-s2w-barrel/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2016/06/15/semi-automatic-rifle-used-in-florida-mass-shooting-is-restricted-in-canada.html>

<sup>9</sup> **Liberal Party of Canada** election platform (guns), <https://www.liberal.ca/realchange/guns/>

<sup>10</sup> **Calibre Magazine**, "The Kel-Tec Is Coming to Canada... And It's Non-Restricted", September 26, 2017. <https://calibremag.ca/the-kel-tec-rdb-is-coming-and-its-non-restricted/>; advertising seen on November 6, 2017: <http://www.firearmsoutletcanada.com/kel-tec-rfb-308-win-18-5.html#.WhYSqjWnEkl>

### *The impact of legislation on death rates involving firearms*

There has been important progress regarding the misuse of firearms since 1991's Bill C-17 and 1995's Bill C-68 became law, both of which introduced new controls on non-restricted firearms. The homicide rate involving such weapons has dropped radically over the years that the new measures were in place, while the rate of murders using handguns, which have been registered since 1951, did not show a similar trend.

Here is a summary of the evolution of firearms deaths following enactment of C-17 and C-68:

- **Homicides:** The rate of homicides committed with long guns has dropped from 0.41 (1986-1990 average) to 0.10 (2010-2014 average) per 100,000 population,<sup>11</sup> a 75% reduction.
- **Homicides by intimate partners:** The number of women killed by firearms decreased by 67 % between 1996 and 2007 (from 27 to 9)<sup>12</sup>.

In the past, firearms (mostly rifles and shotguns<sup>13</sup>) were the weapons most likely to be used in domestic murders (more than one third<sup>14</sup>). Ten years after Bill C-68 became law, the proportion of domestic murders committed with a firearm had diminished to 1 in 5<sup>15</sup>.

- **Suicide:** The number of suicides involving firearms dropped from more than 1000 per year between 1980 and 1993<sup>16</sup> to less than 600 per year between 2005 and 2013<sup>17</sup>.
- **Accidents:** The number of fatal accidents involving firearms dropped from 60 or more per year between 1987 and 1991<sup>18</sup> to 20 or fewer between 2005 and 2013<sup>19</sup>.

### *Impact on the number of gun owners*

One of the many impacts of strict control on firearms possession is to encourage responsible gun ownership, by limiting possession to people who take their sport or hobby seriously enough to willingly accept safety regulations regarding the storage, transportation and use of weapons. It was therefore predictable that the new legislation introduced in 1991 and 1995 would have the effect of persuading many "casual" gun owners to give up their guns rather than go through the process needed to conform to the new rules.

Consequently, the number of Firearms Acquisition Certificates (FACs) issued until 1999 and of the new Firearms Possession Permits (FPPs) issued since then has seen a decline over the years as the new

<sup>11</sup> **Statistics Canada**, Chart 4 Firearm-related homicides, by selected type of firearm, Canada, 1984 to 2014, 2015.

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2015001/article/14244/c-g/desc/desc04-eng.htm>

<sup>12</sup> **Statistics Canada**, Section 5 : Fact Sheet — Family Homicides, in *Family Violence in Canada: a statistical profile*, 2009. Viewed March 14, 2016.

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/2009000/part-partie5-eng.htm>

<sup>13</sup> **Statistics Canada**, *Family Violence in Canada: a statistical profile*, 2009. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/85-224-x2009000-eng.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> **Statistics Canada**, *National trends in intimate partner homicides, 1974 à 2000*, 2002.

<http://www.publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.562917/publication.html>

<sup>15</sup> **Statistics Canada**, Viewed March 14, *Victims of intimate and non-intimate partner homicide, by cause of death, Canada, 2000 to 2010*.

Viewed March 14, 2016. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2012001/article/11643/c-g/desc/desc02-8-eng.htm>

<sup>16</sup> **Justice Canada**, *Firearm Statistics Updated Tables*, 2006. [http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/crime/rr06\\_2/rr06\\_2.pdf](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/crime/rr06_2/rr06_2.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> **Statistics Canada** (CANSIM), *Deaths and mortality rate, by selected grouped causes, age group and sex, Canada – annual*.

[http://polysesouvient.ca/Documents/STAT\\_17\\_11\\_15\\_CANSIM\\_102\\_0551\\_Suicides\\_Accidents\\_Firearms\\_2000\\_2013.pdf](http://polysesouvient.ca/Documents/STAT_17_11_15_CANSIM_102_0551_Suicides_Accidents_Firearms_2000_2013.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> **Justice Canada**, *Firearm Statistics Updated Tables*, 2006. [http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/crime/rr06\\_2/rr06\\_2.pdf](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/crime/rr06_2/rr06_2.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> **Statistics Canada** (CANSIM), *Deaths and mortality rate, by selected grouped causes, age group and sex, Canada – annual*.

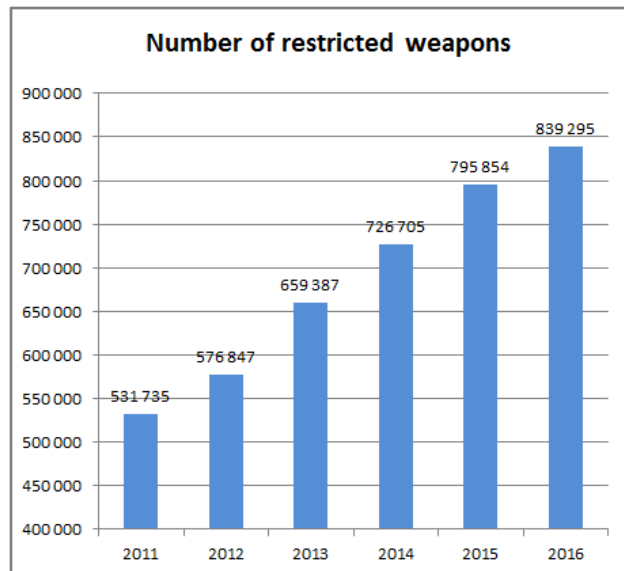
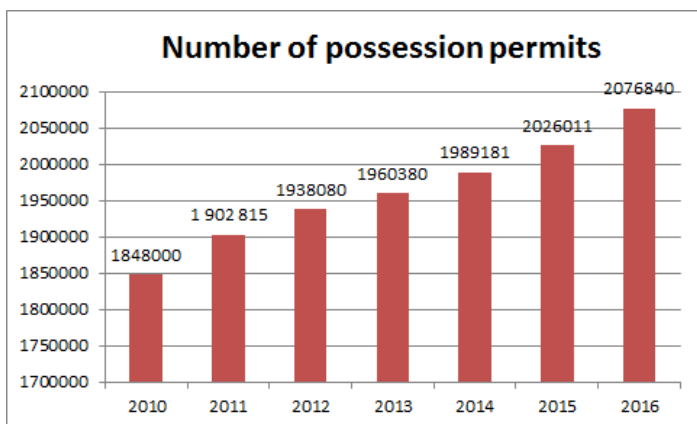
[http://polysesouvient.ca/Documents/STAT\\_17\\_11\\_15\\_CANSIM\\_102\\_0551\\_Suicides\\_Accidents\\_Firearms\\_2000\\_2013.pdf](http://polysesouvient.ca/Documents/STAT_17_11_15_CANSIM_102_0551_Suicides_Accidents_Firearms_2000_2013.pdf)

regulations came into force.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the number of restricted weapons in Canada has dropped from over a million between 1991 and 2001, to 600,000 in 2004.<sup>21</sup>

In short, as possession of firearms was more and more concentrated among the most serious of gun enthusiasts, the number of cases of misuse declined. This is completely in line with the scientific consensus in that a larger number of firearms is associated with a greater number of injuries, suicides and murders ... and vice-versa<sup>22</sup>.

### *Reversal of trends: the number of weapons and owners*

At the time when the government of the day was declaring amnesties for failure to respect some important measures, dismantling the long-gun registry, encouraging the proliferation of assault weapons, and weakening other safety provisions, the number of possession permits increased constantly — reaching a new record in 2016<sup>23</sup>. The number of permits for restricted weapons, which include more and more models of assault weapons, has also increased dramatically, by more than 50% in five years<sup>24,25</sup>.



<sup>20</sup> Justice Canada, *Firearm Statistics Updated Tables*, 2006, tables 4 and 5. [http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/crime/rr06\\_2/rr06\\_2.pdf](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/crime/rr06_2/rr06_2.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Justice Canada, *Firearm Statistics Updated Tables*, 2006, table 3. [http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/crime/rr06\\_2/rr06\\_2.pdf](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/crime/rr06_2/rr06_2.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Harvard Injury Control Research Center, *Homicide*, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/guns-and-death/>; *Suicide*, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/gun-ownership-and-use/>; *Accidents*, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/gun-threats-and-self-defense-gun-use/>

<sup>23</sup> RCMP, *Commissioner of Firearms Reports, 2010 to 2015; 2016 Commissioner of Firearms Report* <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/2016-commissioner-firearms-report>

<sup>24</sup> "The number of restricted firearms — a category made up predominantly of handguns — owned by Canadians has shot up nearly 50 per cent over the last five years, climbing to 795,854 in 2015 from just under 532,000 in 2011." *The Spectator*, "Restricted firearms owned by Canadians rose 50 per cent over the last five years", November 20, 2016. <http://www.thespec.com/news-story/6976744-restricted-firearms-owned-by-canadians-rose-50-per-cent-over-the-last-five-years/>

<sup>25</sup> "More and more Canadians own handguns — restricted handguns owned by individuals increased by 46 per cent in just five years, from 467,146 in 2012 to 684,152 in early 2017." *Global News*, "After the 2015 federal election, Canadian handgun sales broke records", April 6, 2017. <http://globalnews.ca/news/3356614/after-the-2015-federal-election-canadian-handgun-sales-broke-records/>

### Reversal of trends: Firearm homicides

The statistics for accidents and suicides are difficult to obtain, but the most recent *Juristat* published by Statistics Canada demonstrate that the number of firearm-related homicides is trending upwards since the weakening of the law as of 2012, which includes:

- passage of Bill C-19 in 2012 to abolish registration of non-restricted firearms, the mandatory verification of the validity of a buyers permits, and sales registries for these weapons, and
- passage of Bill C-24 in 2015 weakening control over the transportation of restricted firearms, increasing access to assault weapons, and allowing thousands of gun owners to acquire new weapons without screening (transformation of the Possession Only Licence held by owners before 1995 into a Possession and Acquisition Licence).

Indeed, according to the latest data from Statistics Canada<sup>26</sup>, firearm-related homicides increased in number and rate for the third year in a row (2014, 2015 and 2016). The number of firearm homicides rose 19% in 2014 from the previous year, 14% in 2015 and 25% in 2016, for an overall increase of 70% in three years. (The *rate* of gun homicides increased by 64% in three years, and currently represents “the highest rate since 2005”). This trend arrives after a long period of decline that started in 1991 and reached its lowest rate in 40 years in 2013<sup>27</sup>.

Year	Firearms homicides	Firearms homicides (rate per 100,000 population)
2011 – Last complete year covered by Bills C-17 and C-68	158	0.46
2012 – Passage of C-19	172	0.49
2013 – First year without controls on rifles and shotguns (registration)	131	0.37
2014	156	0.44
2015 – Passage of C-42	178	0.55
2016	223	0.61

For the first time since 2012, shootings in 2016 were the most common method of committing a homicide in Canada (38%), exceeding stabbings (30%).

From a public safety perspective, it is essential to reverse these trends caused by weakened legislation in recent years and to maintain the progress in reducing crimes and deaths that began after the 1991 and 1995 reforms.

### Recommended measures

The measures we are asking for aim to improve public safety and protect the entire population against the avoidable risks presented by firearms. Gun control is not a miracle solution that will prevent all tragedies

<sup>26</sup> **Statistics Canada**, *Juristat* 2012, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2013001/article/11882-eng.htm>; “As a result of the decline in shootings, the 2013 rate of firearm-related homicides was the lowest recorded by the Homicide Survey since comparable data became available in 1974 (0.37 per 100,000 population)”, *Juristat* 2013, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14108-eng.htm> and <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14108/c-g/desc/desc04-eng.htm>; *Juristat* 2014, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2015001/article/14244-eng.htm>; *Juristat* 2016, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/54879-eng.htm>

<sup>27</sup> “As a result of the decline in shootings, the 2013 rate of firearm-related homicides was the lowest recorded by the Homicide Survey since comparable data became available in 1974 (0.37 per 100,000 population)”. **Statistics Canada**, *Juristat* 2013, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14108-eng.htm> and <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14108/c-g/desc/desc04-eng.htm>

involving guns. The point is to *reduce the probability* that weapons fall into the hands of people who are known to be mentally unstable or who have malicious intent, in order for violence or suicide attempts to be more likely to end in injury rather than death.

(It should be noted that Poly Remembers adamantly continues to support of the registration of all firearms. However, given the repeated assertions by the current government that it will not reinstate the long gun registry, we have not included this measure in our list.)

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Tighten eligibility criteria and strengthen the screening process for people wishing to acquire, renew or keep a Possession and Acquisition Licence (PAL);
2. Forbid all marketing that encourages multiple registrations with respect to firearms safety training courses;
3. Strengthen the measures related to the sale and transfer of firearms, including the reinstatement of mandatory verification of the validity of a potential buyers licence;
4. Reinstate the full discretion of Chief Provincial Firearms Officers as well as the full authority of the RCMP with regards to establish additional safety conditions associated with the granting of licences and the classification of firearms according to the law, respectively;
5. Reinstate the controls over the sale of non-restricted weapons, including inventory controls and sales ledgers for gun merchants as well as the requirement to notify authorities of private sales;
6. Reinstate transportation permits for restricted weapons so they include the locations in which a specific weapons can be present;
7. Ban assault weapons, which are designed for killing humans, once and for all; and
8. Revise the measures on large-capacity magazines in order to eliminate an important loophole and impose a real limit of 5 rounds for non-restricted weapons and 10 for restricted weapons.

We are convinced that these demands are reasonable and perfectly coherent with a society founded on peace, order and good government. We hope we can count on you to support these measures in order to make the public interest the government's priority rather than the interests of a loud minority of opponents of gun control.

Sincerely,

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Coordinator

**Nathalie Provost**, B.Ing. MB  
Member and spokesperson