

PolySeSouvient / Poly Remembers

Étudiants et diplômés de Polytechnique pour le contrôle des armes
Students and Graduates of Polytechnique for gun control

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[Translation of original French letter]

Montreal, November 25th 2019

The Honourable Bill Blair
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness
Government of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9

Dear Minister,

Allow us to congratulate you on your appointment as Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and to offer you our support as you embark on fulfilling the election promises related to gun control. We are fully optimistic as to their realization during the new liberal mandate given the explicit support of three opposition parties ([NDP](#), [Bloc Québécois](#) and [Green Party](#)) for many of the promised measures, in particular the ban on assault weapons.

It is in the spirit of these promises that we urge you today to consider implementing an immediate moratorium on new sales of assault weapons as well as a permanent ban on the importation and manufacture of handguns.

As you well know, the problem of gun crime and violence is growing and requires urgent action. According to Statistics Canada, the number of firearm homicides has increased for the fourth year in a row, with the number of firearm homicides more than doubling (from 131 in 2013 to 266 in 2017) and the current rate representing the "[highest rate observed in Canada since 1992](#)". It should be noted that this escalation follows the dismantling of major gun control measures starting in 2012 by the previous Harper government.

Handguns

An immediate ban on the the importation and manufacture of handguns is not the same as banning them outright — as sales, transfers and ownership would continue within Canada — but it would at least stop the exponential increase in their numbers. Indeed, the number of privately held handguns has doubled in the last seven years, going from [460 000 in 2012](#) to [935 000 in 2019](#) – an 103% increase. If we do not act immediately to reverse this trend, the proliferation of handguns will surely reach a point of no return.

Polysesouvient est un groupe de citoyens bénévoles, dont de nombreux témoins, survivants et familles des victimes du massacre du 6 décembre 1989, qui oeuvrent pour un meilleur contrôle des armes et dont les objectifs sont endossés par l'Association des Étudiants de Polytechnique, l'Association des étudiants aux cycles supérieurs de Polytechnique, le CA de l'Association des diplômés de Polytechnique, l'Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec, le Réseau des ingénieurs du Québec, l'École Polytechnique, l'École de technologie supérieure et plusieurs associations étudiantes de génie du Québec.

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While the Liberal Party has not committed to banning the private ownership of handguns on the national level, it has promised to [work with the provinces and territories to give municipalities the ability to further restrict or ban them](#). Unfortunately, local bans are generally ineffective, as the disastrous patchwork of local and state laws south of the border clearly demonstrates. In addition, local bans would have to overcome enormous obstacles including [provincial governments ideologically opposed to gun control](#) and an array of legal and jurisdictional complexities, in addition to long and acrimonious political battles against an increasingly powerful gun lobby. **We therefore hope to convince you of the need to ban handguns on a national level instead of ceding that responsibility to municipalities** — a position strongly supported by the [City of Montreal](#) as well as [Toronto's Board of Health](#).

Assault weapons

Survivors and families of the December 1989 femicide have been fighting for stricter controls for 30 years including, [first and foremost, a prohibition of assault weapons](#). We are happy and relieved by the strength of the Liberal Party's promise in this regard, as it contains a buy-back program that ensures these weapons will be completely removed from Canadian homes and communities within two years. And we are particularly looking forward to the banning of the [Ruger Mini-14](#), the gun used to kill our sisters and daughters and injure as many in under 20 minutes, as [Prime Minister Justin Trudeau hinted would be the case](#) during the last election campaign. To this day, the Ruger Mini-14 remains a non restricted firearm despite [an earlier 1999 Liberal commitment](#) to ban it.

An immediate moratorium on new sales of assault weapons would be entirely consistent with your party's election promise. Why allow the continued sale of weapons which are to be banned and bought-back in the near future? We already witnessed [an earlier rush to buy AR-15s](#) following a single rumour of its potential prohibition that was raised during a speech in the House of Commons.

In answer to which guns should be included in the definition of "assault weapons", our response is that any weapon or accessory that facilitates mass shootings should simply not be legal. As for where to draw the line, **we support the [New Zealand model](#) that essentially bans all semi-automatic firearms excluding .22 calibre rimfire rifles and certain pump action shotguns, except we propose limiting magazines to 5 bullets instead of 10**. The Quebec Mosque shooter carried out his attack with [five 10-bullet magazines](#), killing six and injuring many others [in less than two minutes](#).

Canada theoretically caps magazines at 5 or 10 bullets for non restricted and restricted firearms respectively, but [loopholes](#) and the [legal availability of "modifiable" magazines](#) make a mockery of these limits. Indeed, [at least three recent mass shooters](#) all modified their magazines to render them to their full illegal capacity. **We expect the ban on assault weapons to address these major flaws**.

Other measures

In addition to banning assault weapons and handguns and [the list of commitments](#) contained in the Liberal election platform, we ask you to consider the following measures:

- 1- **Invest significant additional resources** (including through contribution agreements with the provinces) **in order to strengthen the screening process for licence applicants** (ensuring systematic follow-up with references, spouses/former spouses, employers and any medical authority that would have treated the candidate for a mental health disorder) **as well as preventative interventions among current owners** like the revocation of licences and removal of firearms **in a way that is firmly based on the precautionary principle.**
- 2- **Allow police greater access to sales records as well as techniques that systematically compile this data in order to flag bulk purchases in an effective and timely way.**

(If restricted firearms like handguns remain legal:)

- 3- **Require restricted firearms to remain at gun clubs in secure storage facilities or compartments** (central storage).
- 4- **Consider banning online sales of restricted firearms along with banning kits, components and blueprints meant to produce homemade firearms like untraceable ghost guns.**

Please accept our appreciation for your consideration of these recommendations and for your ongoing work to protect the safety of all Canadians. We would be delighted to meet with you and your staff to discuss these measures further and to support their achievement without delay.

As victims and witnesses to extreme violence committed with guns, we are seeking to honour our loved ones by securing concrete measures to prevent further tragedies.

[Signatures on original]

Heidi Rathjen

Polytechnique graduate and coordinator
of PolyRemembers

Nathalie Provost

Polytechnique graduate, survivor and
Spokesperson of PolyRemembers

On behalf of:

Suzanne Laplante-Edward, mother of Anne-Marie
James Edward, father of Anne-Marie Edward
Jimmy Edward, brother of Anne-Marie Edward
René Giroux, step-father of Geneviève Bergeron
Claire Roberge, stepmother of Geneviève Bergeron
Sylvie Haviernick, sister of Maud Haviernick
Jean-François Larrivée, husband of Maryse
Laganière
Serge Saint-Arneault, brother of Annie Saint-
Arneault

and
Boufeldhia Benabdallah, President of the Quebec
Mosque
Kathlene Dixon, witness to the Dawson College
massacre and mother of survivor Meaghan Hennegan
Louise Hevey de Sousa, mother of Anastasia de Sousa
(Dawson)
Nelson de Sousa, father of Anastasia de Sousa
Michel LeRoux, father of police officer Thierry LeRoux