

U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

The nation was horrified by the massacre of children in Newtown, Connecticut in December. That tragedy followed other recent mass killings in Aurora, in Oak Creek, in Tucson, and elsewhere. Other communities that have witnessed mass killings in recent years, including some in the Eastern District of California, have received less notoriety because the victims have fallen one or two at a time, rather than on a single day. The City of Stockton set new records for homicides the last two years in a row. Parts of Fresno, Sacramento, Bakersfield and Vallejo have endured a rash of gun violence, in which most of the victims were young people. Law enforcement has suffered, too. Even as violent crime was trending downward in recent years, killings of law enforcement officers were rising.

The Attorney General has urged U.S. Attorneys to focus on combatting gun violence, and we have been doing precisely that. In this district, Project Safe Neighborhood prosecutions, which primarily consist of federal prosecutions of dangerous felons for the illegal possession of firearms, have increased in each of the last three years. In 2012, we prosecuted more defendants on firearms charges than at any time in recent years. Over the last 12 months, we have convicted 23 members and associates of the Bakersfield Eastside Crips, mostly on firearms charges, in a concerted effort to target violent members of that gang. The 21 who have already been sentenced will be serving an average of five years in prison. There is no early release in the federal system, and these defendants will be serving their full sentences in federal prisons located far from Bakersfield.

We have also prioritized the prosecution of those who seek to evade legal restrictions on the purchase and trafficking of firearms. Seven defendants, including several straw buyers, are being prosecuted for a scheme to purchase rifles in Madera which were intended for re-sale in Mexico. Last June we charged two Sacramento Sheriff's deputies, a federal firearms licensee, and a fourth man with participating in a scheme to purchase high-capacity firearms that were only available to law enforcement officers and then resell the guns to the public. One of the deputies has pleaded guilty in that case.

To reduce gun violence in the future, however, we must do more than vigorously enforce existing federal firearms laws. The U.S. Department of Justice is working to build a more robust database so that the National Instant Criminal Background Check System can be more effective. The President recently announced a number of helpful executive actions, including expanding tracing of all federally-seized firearms, making grant funds available to hire School Resource Officers, and improving access to mental health treatment. He is also advocating commonsense legislation to keep dangerous weapons out of the wrong hands, such as universal background checks for gun purchasers, improving laws to prevent straw purchases, and banning the sale of military-style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

There is no single remedy to the plague of gun violence. Protecting our communities will require a long-term commitment and a range of strategies. Positive results will be gradual. But the tragedy in Newtown reminds us that the price of inaction is intolerable.

If you would like to communicate with our office, contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

United States Attorney

Benjamin B. Wagner