

# Portland Press Herald (Maine)

December 8, 2004

## Campaign Aims to Reduce Gun Violence

by David Hench

Federal and state law enforcement agencies are launching a campaign today to cut down on gun violence, especially gun crimes associated with domestic violence.

“Victims of domestic abuse are vulnerable victims, and keeping guns out of the hands of those who abuse their wives, girlfriends or the mothers of their children is absolutely essential to make Maine a safe state,” said U.S. Attorney Paula Silsby. Silsby plans to attend a news conference today with Gov. John Baldacci, Attorney General Steven Rowe and Public Safety Commissioner Michael Cantara to announce the ad campaign.

Federal law prohibits people convicted of domestic violence from possessing a gun, and violating that prohibition can land someone in federal prison, Silsby said. That is a main theme of the advertising campaign, which is part of a federal initiative called Project Safe Neighborhoods.

Many people don’t realize that the consequences of being convicted of abuse include a lifelong prohibition against owning a firearm, Silsby said.

“We’re hoping we can send a message making sure domestic abusers understand we’re enforcing that law,” she said.

The kickoff of the advertising campaign coincides with a daylong conference on developing strategies to reduce gun violence. The conference, at the Augusta Civic Center, includes 200 participants from across the state and the political spectrum. In

addition to law enforcement and community leaders, groups such as the National Rifle Association and Maine Citizens Against Handgun Violence will participate in the conference, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

A sampling of cases in five Maine courts showed that in 2003 and 2004, 14 percent of all protection-from-abuse orders indicated that the defendant had threatened the use of a gun, Cantara said.

The level of gun violence in Maine is among the lowest in the country; only Vermont and North Dakota have lower rates.

Cantara said the low rate of gun violence is an opportunity.

“The actual numbers in Maine are relatively small and yet they carry with them irreparable damage and, at times, eternal cost,” Cantara said. “The numbers suggest we can get our hands around this problem and make a difference in keeping families safer.”

<http://pressherald.maintoday.com/news/state/041208silby.shtml>

Copyright © 2004 Blethen Main Newspapers, Inc.