

DWIGHT EVANS, LOCAL LAWMAKERS ANNOUNCE 2007 CRIME PACKAGE

Legislators, Mayors optimistic about common sense strategies to reduce violence

PHILADELPHIA (Jan. 10, 2007) --- State Rep. Dwight Evans, legislators from the Southeast and local mayors today pledged to join forces in a unified effort to pass legislation that will strengthen Pennsylvania laws and curb increased violence statewide associated with illegal guns and drugs.

“Today I am here to announce that this group of legislators, and others who could not be here, are resubmitting 13 bills that will make Pennsylvania a model state in terms of gun policies. This is legislation will help local officials make their communities safe places where education, commerce and culture can thrive,” said Evans, a leading voice in the legislature on the issue of guns, crime and violence. “Common sense gun policies can be enacted without infringing on the rights of law-abiding hunters and sportsmen. But it’s time to admit we need to give police and prosecutors more tools to fight violent crime.”

The timing of the announcement follows increasing concern in the public about rising levels of violence and the release of an editorial by the Delaware County Times which on Jan. 4, said the legislature should start a new session of reform and effective government by “...tackling the scourge that is ravaging our streets – gun violence.”

Joining Evans at Philadelphia City Hall for the announcement were Philadelphia Delegation Chair Jewell Williams and locally elected city officials; suburban legislators and Allentown Mayor Ed Pawlowski.

Pawlowski called said the crime package is comprised of “common sense, practical laws.”

“Crime is affecting cities throughout Pennsylvania,” said Pawlowski, who is active with the Pennsylvania League of Cities and Municipalities and represented its member mayors. The organization has been on the forefront supporting common sense gun legislation.

“Guns. Gangs. Drugs,” Pawlowski said. “You mix those together and you have problems.”

The package of 13 bills includes measures that would:

- *limit handgun purchases to one per month;
- *ban the sale of military style assault weapons
- *give police and prosecutors new tools for investigating crimes;
- *increase bail and sentencing for violent crimes and for repeat offenders;
- *allow communities to enact their own gun laws; and
- *require gun owners to file police reports when their guns are lost or stolen.

All of the bills have been in the legislature previously, but it was not until recently that they had any measurable amount of support.

Evans said that with more than 50 new members in the House, intense pressure from the public and the backing of Gov. Edward G. Rendell, support for common sense gun policy is growing. In the past, conservative lawmakers and special interest groups have managed to stop even a discussion on such legislation.

In September, though, largely due to the efforts of Evans and the members of the Philadelphia caucus, Republican lawmakers, who then controlled the flow of legislation, agreed to an unprecedented special session devoted to debating crime bills. The session ran an unexpected three days and resulted in lawmakers signaling support for funding more police statewide, expanding social programs and other prevention strategies; and strengthening some laws.

The key pieces of legislation, though, which are among those in the package being reintroduced, still fell short of support in the House.

State Rep. Thomas Caltagirone, D-Berks, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, said the new bills will move to the floor quickly for debate.

“I have made a commitment to Dwight that this legislation will be dealt with,” Caltagirone said. “It’s the right time. It’s the right thing to do.”

Rep. Michael Gerber, D-Montgomery, who is among suburban legislators backing the bills, said he’s confident about the support from several levels of government, especially fellow House members.

“Last year, when we started this campaign for safer and more secure neighborhoods, there were skeptics who viewed our efforts as mere election time politics. The fact is we were not playing politics and we are determined to keep guns off of our streets,” Gerber said. “There is another important aspect of what we are doing that transcends our efforts to reduce gun violence. Over the course of history, suburban and city legislators failed to work together. They were divided by geography, by race and by party. Our continued effort to curb gun violence shows we are serious about breaking down those barriers, governing cooperatively and addressing other critical regional issues such as mass transit, homeland security and sprawl.”

Others attending the news conference include: Mark Cohen, Harold James, Babette Josephs, William Keller, Mike O’Brien, Cherelle Parker, Tony Payton, Jr., John Sabatina, all D-Philadelphia; John Galloway and Chris King, both D-Bucks; Bryan Lentz, D-Delaware and Rick Taylor, D-Montgomery.