



Opening Statement

**Kathy Flicker
Commissioner
New Jersey State Commission of Investigation
Public Hearing
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Good morning and welcome.

As many of you know, New Jersey has some of the toughest gun control laws in the nation. That's because, as a state, we have taken great pains over the years to try to ensure that firearms, particularly handguns, do not fall into the wrong hands.

But what about ammunition, what about actual bullets? How well do we regulate access to the very projectiles that make guns the lethal weapons they are? As this hearing will show, the Commission through extensive investigation has found disturbing answers to those and other critical questions – questions that bear directly upon government's fundamental duty to safeguard the public.

On any given day, in every county in New Jersey, you can walk into a gun shop or a sporting goods store and purchase firearms ammunition in about as much time, and with almost as much ease, as it takes to buy a soccer ball. All you have to do is display some form of personal proof-of-age identification, pay the clerk and off you go with your

choice of boxes packed with live cartridges. You don't need to demonstrate that you possess the proper credentials to own a gun.

Even if you are expressly prohibited by law from owning a gun, ammunition is another matter entirely. You could be a convicted felon, a gang member, someone with a history of mental illness or violence – a terrorist even. It doesn't matter. Bullets are yours for the buying, and it's all perfectly legal.

This hearing will detail an alarming array of instances in which criminal informants, acting at the direction of our investigators, bought a small arsenal of handgun ammunition from retail outlets all over this state – no questions asked.

We found that individuals later identified as members of a notorious criminal street gang, the Bloods, purchased ammunition at stores in New Jersey, then took target practice at a legitimate indoor firing range.

A statewide analysis of crude, handwritten sales logs – the only form of record-keeping required of stores – revealed the purchase of handgun ammunition by dozens of persons with criminal records ranging from assaults on police officers to domestic violence, sex offenses and ties to organized crime. In one case, 42 convicted felons bought an estimated 15,000 rounds from the same store.

And if stay-at-home shopping is your preference, ammo of all sorts – including particularly deadly hollow-nose bullets – is just a few clicks away on Internet Web sites maintained by sellers in New Jersey and elsewhere, a phenomenon which shows this problem is not at all unique to a single state or region.

Joining us today as we examine these profoundly troubling issues are representatives of local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. They are here to help

us understand the scope and seriousness of the stark threat posed by readily obtained guns and ammunition, particularly in the context of exploding gang violence in cities and suburbs all across this state. We are grateful for their assistance and participation.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, let me remind all of us that the objective of this proceeding – as with all of the work we do at the SCI – is to establish the facts, dispassionately and without regard to where they may lead. Ultimately, that factual record will enable the Commission to complete its statutory mandate to formulate and recommend systemic reforms in the service of the public.

Please call the first witness.