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Reps Hamzy, Burns: Anti-Crime Initiatives Should Include More Funding for Gun Trafficking Task Force



Unit has Solid Record of Getting Guns off Streets; Arresting Underworld Gun Dealers

With the Connecticut General Assembly poised to enact several anti-crime initiatives this year in response to last summer's home invasion murders in Cheshire, state representatives William A. Hamzy and Ron Burns also are planning to pursue an increase in funding for the Statewide

Firearms Trafficking Task Force to reduce gun violence, the legislators said today.

The task force, a unit within the state Department of Public Safety that enforces state gun trafficking and possession laws, is having one of its most successful years ever, thanks to a significant infusion of special funding that was included in the 2007-2009 state budget during the 2007 legislative session, said Representative Hamzy, R-78th District, and Representative Burns, R-77th District.

"The task force is on its way to having one of its most successful years ever in terms of illegal guns confiscated and arrests of individuals involved in illegal gun sales," said Representative Hamzy, who voted for the original bill (House Bill 5922) that created the task force in 2000.

"When it has had the resources it needs, the firearms trafficking task force has been far more effective in getting the job done than all the gun control laws we have put on the books over the years. That is because the task force aggressively targets individuals who sell guns to criminals and confiscates illegal guns used to commit crimes. Gun control laws inconvenience legitimate gun owners but do very little to keep firearms out of the hands of criminals - who acquire them illegally from underworld gun dealers," Representative Hamzy said. "We will be acting on several major anti-crime initiatives over the next few weeks. Providing an adequate and stable source of funding for the firearms trafficking task force ought to be one of them."

"For the first time since special state funding for the unit was cut off as the result of a fiscal crisis in 2003, the state legislature has finally increased its funding, providing it with \$400,000 in 2007-08 and \$400,000 more in 2008-09. If we boost the task force's special funding to \$500,000 for 2008-09 and keep it at that level for the next several years, we can make life very difficult for illegal gun traffickers and the criminals who buy firearms from them. The additional funding will allow the task force to add more officers, conduct more investigations, arrest more illegal gun dealers, take more guns off the streets, and save more innocent lives," Representative Burns said

“The home invasion murders in Cheshire last summer showed just how horribly flawed Connecticut’s criminal justice and parole systems are,” Representative Burns said. “Outraged Connecticut residents demanded that tough new anti-crime laws be put on the books to prevent more murders like them in the years ahead. If we give the task force the resources it needs to keep operating effectively for years into the future, we can do even more to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and protect the law-abiding people of our state.”

The additional funding provided to the task force for 2007-08 enabled the unit to seize 656 illegal firearms and arrest 37 people on gun trafficking charges between January and November of 2007. During the first two years of its existence in 2000-01 and 2001-02, when it was funded at \$500,000 for each year, the task force seized more than 450 illegal guns and arrested almost 100 individuals on gun-related charges. When the Public Safety Committee was considering increasing the task force’s budget in early 2007, their original proposal was to fund it at \$500,000 for both years of the state’s two-year budget, the legislators said.