

City Passes Gun Ordinance

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Lawsuit Possible If Lost, Unreported Weapon Is Used In Crime

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The Hartford city council passed an ordinance Monday allowing the city to sue gun owners if they fail to report their weapon lost or stolen and the gun is used in a crime in Hartford.

With gun violence plaguing city streets, Mayor Eddie A. Perez and members of the council decided they could not wait for legislation pending at the General Assembly to help control the problem.

Instead, city officials pushed for a local ordinance requiring gun owners to report lost or stolen guns to the police within 72 hours, or face civil penalties. Perez first announced the initiative during his state of the city address in March, saying residents bear the brunt of millions of dollars in costs associated with gun violence each year.

"It is a problem we wanted to address, and this is one step in the right direction," Perez said Monday. "We hope it will be strengthened at the state level, so we can continue to deal with illegal guns in our city."

Hartford recorded 164 shooting incidents in 2006. Police say much of the gunfire involves illegal guns, including confiscated firearms whose owners later claim were stolen.

The ordinance gives the city the power to sue any Connecticut resident whose stolen or lost gun is not reported and is then used in a crime in Hartford.

City officials say they hope the law will help the city's lawyers pursue "straw buyers," who purchase weapons legally and then turn them over to individuals who cannot legally own a gun.

Councilman Calixto Torres, who chairs the council's public safety committee, said he hopes the ordinance will persuade those aiding criminals against such behavior.

"It is a deterrent," he said. "It also adds a level of urgency to gun owners - who we know for the most part are responsible people - about where and how they store their firearms."

The city's ordinance will also empower the city's lawyers to attempt to recover some of the costs incurred by the police in connection with many shooting cases, city officials said.

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