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To: Interested Parties

CC: The Education Fund to Stop Gun Violence

From: Joshua Ulibarri

Re: Polling in SD 21 and SD 38 on Proposed Changes to VA's Gun Laws

Date: January 2012

A recent Lake Research Partners surveyⁱ in Virginia Senate Districts 21 and 38 shows voters are concerned with gun-related crime and violence, and oppose weakening state gun laws. **Specifically, strong majorities of voters oppose ending the state's one handgun a month law, allowing guns on campuses, and allowing any person to carry a concealed and loaded gun without a permit or background check.**

The major findings are as follows:

- **Voters are motivated to keep the state's current gun laws and to oppose major changes because they are personally very concerned with gun-related crime and violence.** In SD21, 49% of voters are very concerned (79% concerned overall) and in SD38 45% of voters are very concerned (73% overall).

- Concern about gun-related crime and violence extends even to gun owners in those districtsⁱⁱ: 40% of gun owners in SD21 (74% overall) and 45% of gun owners in SD38 (73% overall) are very concerned about gun-related crime and violence.

- While women show more concern in both districts (62% very concerned and 87% concerned overall in SD21 and 50% very concerned and 79% concerned overall in SD38), men definitely share this concern (72% overall in SD21 and 66% overall in SD38).

- **Voters in both districts want to make gun laws stronger, not less restrictive.** Voters were asked whether "current laws do NOT do enough to prevent gun-related crime and violence, and they should be made stronger, OR current laws make it too difficult for law-abiding people to buy and use guns, and they should be make less restrictive."

- Two-thirds of voters in SD21 (65%) believe the laws should be made stronger (including 52% who strongly believe so) while just 24% say they should be less restrictive. Similarly, half of voters in SD38 (52%) believe laws should be made

stronger (including 45% who strongly believe so) while just a third (32%) believe they should be made less restrictive.

- Half of gun owners in SD21 and a plurality of gun owners in SD38 believe current laws should be made stronger (53% and 48%, respectively).
- **Voters strongly endorse requiring background checks for people purchasing guns and permits for people who want to carry a concealed loaded weaponⁱⁱⁱ.** Ninety-six percent of voters in SD21 and 94% in SD38 agree that anyone who buys a gun should be required to get a background check. In fact, 92% of voters in SD21 and 91% in SD38 strongly agree with that requirement. Gun owners also strongly agree with background checks: 88% of gun owners in SD21 and 91% of gun owners in SD38 **strongly** agree (94% of gun owners agree overall, in both districts). Background checks are important to Virginians, and they want to protect the state system of instant checks run by the state police. Seventy-nine percent of voters in SD21 and 73% in SD38 oppose doing away with the state’s background check system, only a fifth support the change (17% in SD21 and 21% in SD38).
 - **Support for the current system is so strong that voters would support increasing the current fee to run the background checks from \$2 to about \$5.** Seventy nine percent of voters in SD21 and 82% of voters in SD38 support increasing the fees for the background checks so the system can be maintained, rather than moving to the federal system.
 - **Support for required background checks and permits for those who want to carry loaded and concealed handguns in public places is also very strong.^{iv}** Nearly every voter in SD21 agrees with background checks and permits for concealed weapon carriers (98% agree overall, 94% strongly). Agreement is just as strong in SD38 with 91% strongly agreeing and 96% agreeing overall. Gun owners are also very firm in their support for these background and permit requirements: 97% of gun owners in SD21 and 96% of gun owners in SD38 agree overall.
- In Virginia’s current legislative session, many different laws are being debated that would change and weaken current standards.^v Voters in SD21 and SD38 strongly oppose many of those changes. As the table below demonstrates, voters object most strongly to three proposed changes: allowing any person to carry a concealed gun without a permit; allowing students, faculty, and staff to carry loaded guns on campuses, and allowing people to purchase more than one handgun a month.
 - **Nine in ten voters in both districts oppose a suggested change that would allow any person to carry a concealed and loaded gun in public places without a permit or background check.** Ninety-four percent of voters in SD21 and 90% of voters in SD38 oppose that change (strong opposition stands at 85% in both districts). These are among the highest levels of opposition to any gun changes that we have seen in the last seven years. In fact, 91% of gun owners in both Senate Districts oppose changing the law so that any person can carry a concealed and loaded gun without first obtaining a permit or background check.

- **More than seven in ten voters in both districts oppose allowing students, faculty, and staff at Virginia’s state colleges and universities to carry concealed and loaded guns on campus.** Seventy-seven percent of voters in SD21 oppose the change, including 68% who strongly oppose it. Likewise, 71% of voters in SD38 oppose the change, including 65% who strongly oppose the change. Again, gun owners in those districts also oppose the proposed change, with 65% of gun owners in SD21 and 71% of gun owners in SD38 opposing the change.
 - Opposition to allowing guns on campuses is deep and broad. When voters were given additional information^{vi} on the proposed change that would require state universities to allow loaded guns on campuses, 66% of voters in both districts oppose the change: 74% overall in SD21, with 66% strongly opposed, while 68% opposed in SD38 including 58% strongly opposed.
- **More than six in ten voters oppose changing Virginia’s law that currently restricts handgun purchases to one a month.** Three in four voters in SD21 (75%) oppose the change (63% strongly oppose it) and two in three voters in SD38 agree with that opposition (50% strongly). Opposition is also high among gun owners with 58% of gun owners in SD21 and 61% of gun owners in SD38 opposed to changing the current law and allowing people to purchase more than one handgun a month.
- Majorities of voters also oppose prohibiting local judges from obtaining finger prints from people applying for a permit to carry concealed and loaded handguns (66% in SD21 and 60% in SD38) or prohibiting local judges from releasing information as to who has a concealed carry permit in their area (53% oppose in SD21 and 48% oppose in SD38).

In sum, Virginians in SD21 and SD38 are very concerned about gun-related crime and violence, and they want gun laws made stronger, not weaker. Their concern with gun safety goes to the point of sale, and they strongly agree that anyone purchasing a gun should be required to undergo a background check. They oppose a series of suggested changes that would weaken gun laws, but most importantly, they oppose ending the one handgun a month law, allowing guns on campuses, and allowing anyone to carry a concealed and loaded weapon in public places without a background check or permit.

ⁱ **Sample Methodology:** Lake Research Partners designed and administered this telephone survey, using professional interviewers. The survey reached 305 voters in SD21 and 302 voters in SD38. The sample was derived from a list of registered voters with vote history in off year elections such as the 2007 and 2009 November statewide elections. The survey was conducted January 23-25, 2012. The margin of error for the sample is +/-5.7 percentage points.

ⁱⁱ Fifty-one percent of voters in SD21 and 66% of voters in SD38 say there is a gun in their household.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Question wording:** Please tell me if you agree or disagree with this statement: anyone who buys a gun should be required to have a background check done by a licensed gun dealer or law enforcement official to make sure they have no criminal record or are not dangerously mentally ill.

^{iv} **Question wording:** Please tell me if you agree or disagree with this statement: anyone who wants to carry a loaded concealed handgun in public places should be required to pass a background check and obtain a permit to prove they do not have a felony record and are not dangerously mentally ill.

^v **Question wording:** I am going to read a few changes to Virginia gun laws being debated in the State Senate. For each one, please tell me if you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose that change.

^{vi} **Question wording:** Currently, Virginia law allows each university to set its own policy and regulations regarding guns. All of the state universities have decided to prevent loaded guns on their campuses and the Virginia Supreme Court has ruled that to be lawful and Constitutional. The Virginia Senate is considering a proposal to REQUIRE state universities to allow loaded guns on campuses. What do you think? Do you support or oppose this proposed legislation to allow people to carry guns on campuses in Virginia?