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Testimony of Aaron Ford, Nevada Attorney General

Chairs Cannizzaro and Yeager and members of the respective committees, good morning. My name is Aaron Ford, and I am Nevada's Attorney General.

Today I come before you as the state's top law enforcement officer to implore you to close the background check loophole. Closing the background check loophole is a critical public-safety measure that will save lives while also protecting the rights of lawful gun owners. My comments today are divided into these two areas.

While commonly referred to as the "gun show loophole," the lack of background checks for private sales is particularly concerning given the growing online market for gun sales. Using a host of websites or lists, a prohibited person may buy a firearm as easily as you or I could purchase a couch on Craigslist.

It is important to understand how closing this loophole will save lives. Background checks have long been known and shown to be valuable tools in preventing gun violence. Between 2012 and 2014, in Nevada alone, background checks from licensed gun dealers blocked over 5,000 gun sales to prohibited people, including fugitives, felons and domestic abusers.

Research shows that in states with these checks, 46 percent fewer women are killed with guns by intimate partners, 48 percent fewer people commit suicide with guns, and 48 percent fewer police officers are murdered with guns. In Nevada, a state that is consistently among the worst for gun suicides and women killed by intimate partners, we simply cannot afford to allow this loophole to continue. The lack of comprehensive background checks has real consequences for public safety, particularly in a state like Nevada. Lives are on the line.

As I mentioned prior, I can say with 100% certainty that this bill protects the constitutional right of lawful Nevadans to own, purchase, and sell firearms.

Specifically identified in this bill is the ability of lawful gun owners to transfer firearms between immediate family members, and individuals will still be able to pass antiques and family heirlooms from generation to generation without a

background check. Lawful gun owners will also be able to share guns during hunting and sporting events, so long as the owner retains possession of the gun at the end of the event.

This bill also provides a mechanism for lawful owners to sell their guns with the knowledge that they are transferring them to someone permitted to lawfully own them. The vast majority of Nevadans who sell their firearms do not want their guns to fall into the wrong hands. This bill would provide a means so that private gun sellers can ensure that their customer has the legal right to purchase the weapon.

There are, however, a handful of bad actors – gun sellers who profit off of selling weapons to criminals through private sales. Currently, law enforcement cannot prosecute these gun traffickers for selling guns to criminals in private sales; they can only prosecute the criminal for illegally possessing a gun. This bill gives law enforcement an additional tool to keep illegally acquired weapons off our streets and out of the hands of criminals.

The question before you is a simple one: will you vote to implement the will of Nevadans, to protect public safety, and to uphold the rights of lawful gun owners? Every day that we delay could mean another Nevadan is lost to gun violence that could have been prevented by closing this background check loophole. Thank you.