

**Remarks of Attorney General Maura Healey
Assault Weapons Ban Press Conference
As Prepared for Delivery
July 20, 2016**

Good morning. Thank you all for being here.

And thank you to everyone who has joined me up on the podium this morning.

A steady stream of violence has plagued our nation over the past month.

We see the pain and grief of a nation torn by violence.

The single largest mass shooting in our country's history, targeting the LGBT and Latino community.

Black men across the country -- husbands, sons, fathers -- killed by law enforcement.

Eight brave police officers murdered.

Those events are tragic.

33,000 Americans die every year from guns. 90 people a day. Another 200 more who are injured.

There were more mass shootings than calendar days last year.

I believe that we need to have both the empathy and the courage to acknowledge, to understand - the fear, mistrust, and despair that many Americans are feeling.

There are young men in black and brown communities that live their lives fearful of an interaction with the police.

There are police officers that feel not only unsupported by communities they serve, but also that they have a target on their back.

And then there are many who want to manipulate these fears to amplify the problem rather bringing forth solutions.

But I'm interested in moving forward. With empathy – so that we see one another as human beings, and not stereotypes.

And with action.

We cannot let our differences define our humanity. Instead we need a collective effort from all corners to end gun violence and to keep human beings from killing one another.

That's why we are all gathered here today. Because we know we can overcome these challenges. By working together, engaging in honest conversations, investing in our communities and supporting our police forces, we can stop this kind of violence. Much of that work has already begun.

In Massachusetts, law enforcement is receiving unconscious bias education. We've hosted church security trainings for clergy. We've undertaken efforts to reform our criminal justice system and to enhance our policies on use of force and de-escalation for police departments across the state. Police officers and community leaders are walking side by side through our neighborhoods. And we're teaching the next generation a different way.

There is so much more work to do. I am committed to doing everything we can do keep our streets safe and relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve as productive and peaceful as possible.

While we work hard to address the root causes of much of this violence, we're taking immediate action to limit the ability of dangerous people to kill.

Today, we've put gun manufacturers and gun dealers on notice that we're cracking down on the illegal sale of assault weapons in Massachusetts.

Increasingly, assault weapons are the weapons of choice for mass shooters.

They were the kinds of weapons used in Orlando, San Bernardino, Aurora, Colorado and Newtown – the kind of weapon used just four days ago to brutally target and kill three Baton Rouge police officers.

In the wake of Orlando, where the killer took the lives of 49 innocent people with an AR-15 style assault weapon, we took a look at our own state assault weapons ban and gun sales in Massachusetts.

Based on that review, we are taking the action we are taking today.

Massachusetts law prohibits the sale and possession of assault weapons such as the Colt AR-15 and the AK-47. It also expressly prohibits “copies or duplicates” of those weapons.

These deadly assault weapons were originally designed for military combat. They are meant to kill many people in a short amount of time. They do not belong in civilian hands.

In fact, in the week after Orlando, we saw sales of some of these weapons jump as high as 450%.

But despite the laws on our books that ban these weapons, more than 10,000 of them were sold here in Massachusetts last year alone.

You might ask just how is that possible?

Well, for far too long the gun industry has taken it upon itself to interpret our assault weapons ban.

Gun manufacturers have made and marketed copycat weapons that they’ve deemed “state compliant.” They sell guns without certain features – for example, a flash suppressor or folding stock – small tweaks which do nothing to limit the deadliness of the weapon.

They market these weapons as the legal version of a prohibited gun.

Let me be clear: these weapons are illegal. They are copies or duplicates of banned weapons and they cannot be bought or sold here in Massachusetts.

Today, my office sent an enforcement notice to the more than 350 gun dealers and to manufacturers that offers greater clarity in determining what constitutes a copy or duplicate assault weapon.

I want to be perfectly clear - if a gun’s operating system is essentially the same as that of a banned weapon or if the gun has components that are interchangeable with those of a banned weapon, it’s a “copy” or “duplicate,” and it’s illegal.

Assault weapons prohibited under our laws cannot be altered in any way to make their sale or possession legal in Massachusetts.

My office's action today will give us the full protection of the state assault weapons ban – and not leave it to gun manufacturers' self-appointed interpretation.

And our action today is effective immediately.

We recognize that most residents who purchased these guns in the past believed they were doing so legally, so this directive will not apply guns bought or sold before today.

Dealers who currently have these weapons on hand are not permitted to sell them to Massachusetts buyers. They may transfer them out-of-state to jurisdictions where sales of these weapons are legal.

We ask gun dealers to work with us to comply with the law and to be a part of the effort to stop the kinds of mass shootings we've witnessed in this country.

Gun violence is a problem that ultimately demands a federal solution.

And we are clear eyed about the magnitude of the problem.

There are over 350 million guns on American streets, many of them illegal.

There is an enormous amount of work to do.

In the face of inaction by Congress, we have an obligation to do what we can to keep our residents safe. Today, that means stopping the sale of these deadliest guns and giving the people of Massachusetts the full protection of our existing gun laws.

With this coalition around me, with other community leaders, law enforcement, government officials and residents across this state, we will continue our march towards a safer and more peaceful future.

We owe it to everyone who has lost their lives to senseless violence, to their families, their children and to ourselves.

Thank you for being here.