

Aiming for handgun ban

Toronto mayor asks for signatures coast to coast to compel Ottawa to legislate the disarming of everyone but the police

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Toronto Mayor David Miller is taking his campaign to ban handguns to the Internet, asking people across Canada to sign an online petition.

He unveiled his video, now airing on YouTube and the city's website, after family and friends of those killed by gun violence appeared before the executive committee yesterday making impassioned pleas for action.

People spoke of loved ones lost, lives cut short and the grief of those left behind.

Friends of John O'Keefe, who was an accidental victim in a shooting on a January night on a Yonge St. sidewalk after he left a bar to go home, told of the pain and suffering of his 9-year-old son.

"As a result of a single gunshot, Iain will never see his dad again. He never got the chance to say goodbye, or give him a hug, or tell him how much he loved him," said Jennifer Allen, reading a letter from Iain's



RENÉ JOHNSTON/TORONTO STAR

Abdi Warsame recalls the effect gun violence has had on his life - including the loss of a friend shot to death last month - for Toronto city council's executive committee April 7, 2008.

THE LAW

THE ONLY PEOPLE allowed to own handguns in Canada are police and security officers, target shooters and collectors.

THE RESTRICTIONS have been in place since 1968. (Fully automatic weapons have been banned

mother Teresa Kaufman.

In a statement yesterday, Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day noted handguns are already banned in this country except for a few legitimate purposes, a category that includes police officers, target shooters and approved collectors. Miller wants to see the ban extended to target shooters and collectors.

"Our government is focusing on strong laws to combat the gangs who use firearms," Day said in his statement, by adding measures for mandatory jail time for serious gun crimes and tougher bail rules when a gun is used to a commit a crime.

O'Keefe was an innocent bystander walking home after having drinks with his friend Eric Bouchard. O'Keefe was headed to the subway after declining an extra pint, saying he was going skating in the morning with his son.

Instead, a stray bullet hit the 42-year-old in the head, discharged from a gun that was legally owned by a man now charged in his death.

O'Keefe was shot a few blocks up Yonge St. from where 15-year-old shopper Jane Creba was killed in a brazen 2005 Boxing Day shooting that shocked Toronto.

Less than a week after O'Keefe's death, store employee Hou Chang Mao was fatally shot as he was stacking oranges outside a grocery store on Gerrard St. E. in Chinatown East.

Even though the municipal government has no power to prohibit handguns within its borders, Miller insisted the city can turn up the pressure and influence the federal government to declare an outright ban on handguns except for law enforcement officers.

"People heard an extraordinary testament by those whose lives have been torn apart by gun violence," Miller told reporters. "I think those stories are so powerful no government can ignore them."

He added that Parliament is in a position to act if it wants to, noting the presence of a minority government in Ottawa.

Councillor Michael Walker, sponsor of the original motion calling for a ban, said, "I think there's huge momentum on this issue."

since 1977 and all other guns must be registered.)

To own a handgun, you must have a valid licence.

Mayor David Miller wants to see the law changed so that handguns would be banned for collectors, too.

THE MAJORITY of handguns seized by Toronto police are illegal.

At Queen's Park, Attorney General Chris Bentley said he hopes the online petition will spur results.

"Handguns are not necessary in the 21st century in Canada. It's about time the federal government started listening to the people ... on this one. The people are right," Bentley said.

With files from John Spears and Kerry Gillespie