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Statement by Elisabeth MacNamara, President
League of Women Voters of the United States
Hearing on “Proposals to Reduce Gun Violence: Protecting Our
Communities While Respecting the Second Amendment”
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights
Senate Judiciary Committee
February 12, 2013

The League of Women Voters of the United States has a long-standing position, reached by consensus of our members, in support of gun control.

On behalf of our 140,000 members and supporters, we urge you to pass common sense solutions to the gun violence that is plaguing our nation. It is time for Congress to adopt legislation that will close the gun show loophole, ban assault weapons, place limits on high capacity ammunition magazine size, increase penalties for straw purchases of guns, and fund research and reporting on gun violence in America. Curbing gun violence is a matter of public safety and public health.

Along with the majority of American citizens, the League supports closing the gun show loophole and providing for universal background checks. Currently, background checks are required only for sales by the nation's 55,000 federally licensed gun dealers. These checks are not required for the 40 percent of gun sales that take place at gun shows, person-to-person

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sales or other private transactions. A recent Quinnipiac poll found that 92 percent of voters, including 91 percent of gun owners, support background checks on all gun purchasers.

We believe that universal background checks throughout the country could have a significant impact on public safety. In addition, Congress should pass legislation to increase the penalties for straw purchases in which individuals who do not have criminal records buy guns and pass them on to individuals who are not eligible to purchase a firearm, including felons and domestic abusers.

The League believes that the 113th Congress should pass legislation to ban all military-style semi-automatic assault weapons along with high capacity ammunition magazines. The Quinnipiac poll also found that 56 percent of registered voters nationwide support a ban on the sale of assault weapons. Placing limits on magazine size is a common sense solution to shootings that kill many people at once. This limit should include large-capacity magazines and other ammunition feeding devices that hold more than 10 rounds of ammunition. These devices allow shooters to fire numerous rounds in rapid succession without having to stop and reload.

In order to confront the public health impact of gun violence, we support efforts, including the recent Executive Order by President Obama, to have federal agencies research the impact of guns on public health. Federal agencies are well positioned to study and share statistical information on gun violence. We agree with the scholars and researchers who wrote to Vice-President Biden's Task Force on January 10, 2013 that, "The tragedy of gun violence is compounded by the fact that the usual methods for addressing a public health and safety threat of

this magnitude—collection of basic data, scientific inquiry, policy formation, policy analysis and rigorous evaluation—are, because of politically-motivated constraints, extremely difficult in the area of firearm research.”

Throughout the country, local and state Leagues have been holding meetings with their fellow citizens to discuss the crisis of gun violence. They have testified before state legislatures and met with their neighbors in community meetings to come together, air their differences and work together to find common ground and solve some of the difficult problems presented in the gun debate, including mental health issues and the problem of domestic violence. This issue is too important to be ignored any longer. Congress should start to act on common sense solutions to curb gun violence.