



## REPORT TO THE POLICE SERVICE BOARD

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Author: Director Chris Bovie

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Type of Report: Public

Title: Gun Amnesty Report

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### RECOMMENDATION

That the Board receives the Gun Amnesty Report.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At Durham Regional Council's February 26<sup>th</sup> meeting, Whitby Regional Councillor Chris Leahy introduced a motion asking that Durham Regional Police Service (DRPS) implement a gun amnesty for the month of April 2025.

The motion made reference to a number of themes to support the amnesty:

- The last amnesty by DRPS and OPP was back in 2019 and removing guns and informing our public on how to turn in unwanted firearms will enhance community safety.
- That DRPS reported that there was a 33% increase in shootings in 2024 and this trend needs to be addressed.
- That 80 per cent of gun deaths are suicides.

Regional council referred this motion back to the Durham Regional Police Service Board (DRPSB) and additionally asked Chief Moreira to speak to the issue and the efficacy of a gun amnesty at his next regional council presentation.

### DISCUSSION

**Previous amnesty:** The previous gun amnesty was actually held in April 2018. There was a notable increase in reports to surrender firearms during that month (mostly hunting rifles or antique rifles). In about half of those 75 reports the caller identified reading about the amnesty while other cases were more circumstantial or unclear (deceased relative, purchasing a storage unit, etc). It should be noted that DRPS continues to provide the same opportunity for residents to turn in unwanted firearms today that it did during the one-month amnesty period.

Last year, 126 firearms were "turned in" to DRPS. They included:

- Non-restricted – 54
- Restricted/Prohibited – 61
- Other – 11

It is important to understand the term “gun amnesty” gives a false impression. There is no amnesty for criminal offenses related to any gun turned in and those cases individuals will face legal repercussions, during this period we do not change our approach dealing with gun crimes, current and historical. While DRPS is not looking to charge individuals for possession or storage compliance, all firearms will be tested to determine if it was used in the commission of a crime and, if so, those individuals will be investigated and could face charges. Shrouding this practice under the term “amnesty” will not change DRPS normal practice when individuals turn in a firearm.

There can be a valid case made that there has not been enough awareness and education related to educating citizens about how to turn over unwanted firearms. York Regional Police, as an example, promotes not an amnesty but the Safe and Secure Gun Program that educates its community on how to simply and safely dispose of unwanted firearms.

Another challenge in adopting an amnesty at this time, is the federal government announcement of an automatic rifle (AR) amnesty for May 1-Oct. 30, 2025 where individuals will be expecting compensation from Public Safety Canada. While the adoption of this AR Amnesty could be impacted by a number of circumstances including a federal election, DRPS would struggle to manage two amnesties during this period if it were to move forward.

The AR program and other programs have set an expectation of compensation by citizens. In 2013, Toronto Police Service (TPS) ran the Pistols for Pixels campaign in which people turning over firearms received a camera. In 2019, TPS also introduced a three-week gun buy-back program in April offering \$200 for a long gun and \$350 for a handgun. TPS reported they received 1,900 long guns and 800 handguns during that program. During that year, TPS recorded the highest number of shooting/firearms discharges in its history (492 incidents and 284 people injured or killed).

**Reducing Gun Crime:** Removing or having a process to turn in unwanted firearms is a sound concept and one that has a process in place today. Framing an amnesty as a solution to addressing rising gun crime would be misleading and create an expectation that would be unrealistic.

A 2004 study by the National Academy of Sciences found that gun amnesties do not pull in the types of guns used in crimes. In fact, police services have been criticized by media for implementing gun amnesties as more of a public relations exercise than actually dealing with the real issues related to gun violence (Gillis, 2015). Makarous & Pratt (2012) conclude that gun recovery programs (buy-back, amnesty) although “politically popular programs show little or no promise for reducing gun violence. Which was echoed a decade later by Ferrazares et al (2021) in their examination of gun buy-back programs and concluded “that GBPs are an ineffective policy strategy to reduce gun violence”.

While DRPS recorded that 75 firearms were turned in during the April 2018 amnesty (about half of those residents cited the amnesty for the call), it had the second highest number of persons killed or injured by firearm during that year (21 injured 4 killed) compared to 2019 (11 injured 4 killed).

**Firearms and Suicides:** According to a Government of Canada report on firearms, the observed correlation between firearm availability and suicide in general is not as clear as one might expect. In Canada, provincial comparisons found no correlation between suicide rates and overall levels of firearm ownership. However, it is empirically indisputable that where firearms are more widely available, the firearm suicide rate is higher. (Government of Canada, 2022)

## **CONCLUSION**

While DRPS appreciates any opportunities to enhance community safety and reduce gun crime, it is recommended that DRPS does not adopt a gun amnesty at this time. Instead, DRPS should work with the Region of Durham through the Community Safety and Well-Being committee to enhance education across the Region on how citizens can turn in unwanted firearms year-round and the process and legalities associated with this program.

## Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Gun Amnesty .docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Mar 11, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Moreira", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peter MOREIRA