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April 22, 2025

Senator Michael Moore
Representative Kate Lipper-Garabedian
Special Legislative Commission on Emerging Firearm Technology
State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Written Testimony Regarding Personalized Firearms & Microstamping Technology

Chairpersons and Members of the Commission:

On behalf of the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association, we thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the potential implementation of personalized firearms and microstamping technology in the Commonwealth.

Personalized Firearms

Personalized, or "smart," firearms—designed to operate only when held by an authorized user—are frequently cited as a potential tool to prevent unauthorized use, including suicides, accidental discharges, and the misuse of stolen firearms. While these objectives are commendable, the current state of this technology raises significant concerns that warrant caution before pursuing legislative mandates.

Firearms intended for home or personal defense must be reliable in high-stress, life-threatening scenarios. Many lawful gun owners express valid concerns regarding the operational reliability of biometric or RFID-based smart guns. These systems can fail due to battery issues, sensor errors, or interference from environmental conditions. Moreover, households may include multiple responsible adults who require immediate access to a firearm—functionality that smart guns may not adequately support.

In contrast, firearm safes—many of which now include biometric access—provide secure and rapid means of access without compromising reliability.

These devices are readily available at accessible price points and are already mandated by Massachusetts law, which requires all firearms to be stored securely when not in use. We believe that education and incentives to promote secure storage practices, rather than mandates for emerging and unproven technologies, will yield more immediate and reliable results in preventing unauthorized firearm use.

We further recommend expanding public awareness campaigns, such as those led by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), including high-profile efforts like their public service announcement featuring Shaquille O’Neal. MCOPA anticipates the release of additional IACP materials on firearm safety in the coming months.

Microstamping Technology

Microstamping, which involves engraving a unique code on the firing pin to leave an identifiable imprint on cartridge casings, has been discussed as a tool for tracing firearms used in crimes. While this concept shows theoretical promise, it remains scientifically unproven and operationally impractical for widespread implementation at this time.

Currently, no U.S. jurisdiction has fully implemented a functioning microstamping mandate. Challenges include durability of the microstamp, degradation with repeated firing, and the ease with which firing pins can be replaced or altered. Additionally, any such mandate in Massachusetts would be of limited effectiveness, as over 60% of crime guns recovered in the Commonwealth originate from out-of-state sources.

Even in optimal conditions, microstamping would only link a casing to the last lawful purchaser, which does little to aid investigations when the firearm is stolen—common in cases involving violent crime. Furthermore, manufacturers would face logistical burdens in assigning unique identifiers to each firearm without knowing its ultimate destination. For Massachusetts to implement microstamping effectively, it would require an expansive tracking infrastructure and coordination across the entire supply chain—challenges that are both costly and unproven.

Current Tools in Use

Importantly, Massachusetts law enforcement agencies already have access to proven and effective forensic tools. The National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN), managed by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), enables law enforcement to match cartridge casings from crime scenes with those test-fired from seized firearms. The Massachusetts State Police Firearms Identification Section and the Boston Police Firearms Analysis Unit contribute regularly to NIBIN, generating over 200 actionable investigative leads annually.

Additionally, ATF's eTrace system facilitates the tracing of firearms to their last known legal purchaser and is integrated with NIBIN to support a broader Crime Gun Intelligence (CGI) framework. The enactment of Chapter 135 of the Acts of 2024, which mandates the use of

eTrace, NIBIN, and a statewide crime and suicide gun database under M.G.L. c. 140, § 131Q, reinforces Massachusetts' leadership in crime gun intelligence and tracing technology.

Conclusion

Massachusetts consistently ranks among the states with the lowest levels of gun violence—thanks in part to its robust and balanced approach to firearm regulation. The MCOPA supports continued research into emerging technologies such as personalized firearms and microstamping. However, given the current limitations and unanswered questions surrounding their efficacy, reliability, and feasibility, we respectfully oppose any legislative mandate requiring their adoption at this time.

Instead, we urge the Commission to consider alternative strategies, including public education, voluntary incentives for research and development, and investments in existing technologies already proving effective in criminal investigations.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer this testimony and remain available for any questions the Commission may have.

Respectfully submitted,

The Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association, Inc.

By and through:

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