

# Most Nev. sheriffs against gun background check initiative

By Ken Ritter, AP

Sheriffs in most Nevada counties have come out against a background check initiative that gun control advocates are supporting on the ballot this November, but the top cop in the largest police agency in the state says he'll sit this one out.

"This is a vote of the people," Joe Lombardo, sheriff of Clark County and head of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, told the Associated Press. "I've chosen to remain neutral on this."

In the rest of the state, most of the other 16 elected sheriffs oppose Question 1, the Nevada Background Checks for Gun Purchases Initiative.

"Any bill that does not address mental health, which I believe to be the core cause of the violence we've had across the country, does not meet my expectations," said Kenny Furlong, sheriff in Carson City. "Mental health has to be addressed."

Sheriff Sharon Wehrly in Nye County said she believed the initiative chips away at Second Amendment rights.

"It merely places more restrictions on good people, will make it more difficult, and incur unnecessary costs for law-abiding citizens to manage their personal property," she said.

Backers of the measure say they have broad support – ranging from former sheriffs in Clark and Washoe counties, Bill Young and Mike Haley, to endorsements from groups including the Latin Chamber of Commerce, Nevada Parent Teacher Association,

school teachers' union and the Nevada Public Health Association.

"It really shows how gun violence is impacting various areas in our communities," said Jennifer Crowe, spokeswoman for Nevadans for Background Checks. "They know it'll make a difference and save lives."

A yes vote would require background checks through a licensed gun dealer when most firearms change hands, except for temporary transfers of a weapon while hunting or target shooting, for immediate self-defense, and transfers between immediate family members. A licensed dealer would be allowed to charge a fee for a background check.

Proponents call the lack of background checks a loophole in the law.

The National Rifle Association is the leading opponent of the Nevada measure, while supporters are heavily funded by Everytown for Gun Safety Action Fund, a group affiliated with former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Furlong helped draft a Nevada Sheriffs' and Chiefs' Association letter in February 2013, signed by all 17 sheriffs in Nevada at that time, that opposed expanding background checks for weapon purchases.

Most of the sheriffs in the state met this week in Ely, and considered at that meeting a revision of the February 2013 letter, said Robert Roshak, executive director of the association. Eight sheriffs who signed in 2013 are no longer in office, including Haley in Washoe County.

Chuck Allen, Haley's successor, said he promised voters he'd oppose the measure when he ran for office in 2014.

"The core principle is not to infringe our right to keep and bear arms," Allen said during a break in the sheriffs' meeting

on Thursday. "We need to focus on other issues like mental health, keeping firearms out of the hands of criminals, and not imposing more restrictions on law-abiding citizens."

Furlong experienced a mass shooting when a man who had been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia opened fire in a Carson City IHOP restaurant in September 2011, killing four people, wounding seven others and then killing himself.

He said legal mental health confidentiality would have blocked a background check from flagging the shooter as a person who shouldn't buy a gun.

"How do background checks break through the wall that guarantees and protects a person's privacy, and still provide for public safety?" Furlong asked

Crowe, however, said data shows low numbers of police officers killed with firearms, gun suicides and rates of women shot and killed by their intimate partners in the 18 states with laws like the one on the Nevada ballot.

"In states that have closed the loophole, they've cut gun violence," she said.

Lombardo's agency, with about 2,500 sworn officers, covers a city and most of a county home to 2 million residents and more than 40 million tourists a year. The area just topped 100 homicides this year – most of them shootings.

He said he'd support stricter background checks if the initiative passes, and didn't foresee it being a burden on law enforcement.

"A system in which a private seller can have access to determine if a buyer is a prohibited person, and in a timely manner, is ideal," he said.