

Dear _____,

I am a constituent in your riding. I am writing to you to voice my concerns about the new provisions announced under proposed Bill C-21, and how it impacts myself and my community.

"Criminal Code 1 (1) The definition replica firearm in subsection 84(1) of the Criminal Code is replaced by the following:

replica firearm means any device that is designed or intended to exactly resemble, or to resemble with near precision, a firearm that is designed or adapted to discharge a shot, bullet or other projectile at a muzzle velocity exceeding 152.4 m per second and at a muzzle energy exceeding 5.7 Joules, and that itself is not a firearm, but does not include any such device that is designed or intended to exactly resemble, or to resemble with near precision, an antique firearm; (réplique)

(2) Section 84 of the Act is amended by adding the following after subsection (3.1):
Certain firearms deemed to be prohibited devices

(3.2) For the purposes of sections 99 to 101, 103 to 107 and 117.03, a firearm is deemed to be a prohibited device if

- (a) it is proved that the firearm is not designed or adapted to discharge a shot, bullet or other projectile at a muzzle velocity exceeding 152.4 m per second or at a muzzle energy exceeding 5.7 Joules; and
- (b) the firearm is designed or intended to exactly resemble, or to resemble with near precision, a firearm, other than an antique firearm, that is designed or adapted to discharge a shot, bullet or other projectile at a muzzle velocity exceeding 152.4 m per second and at a muzzle energy exceeding 5.7 Joules."

By way of background, I am an enthusiast in the sport called "airsoft". Airsoft is similar to the well known sport of paintball except instead of balls of paint, players project small plastic BBs at other players who are part of the game. This sport takes place across Canada and is supported by many legitimate businesses such as airsoft fields and airsoft stores.

I was surprised to learn that the new provisions may capture this hobby that is important to many people across Canada. It does so by placing airsoft guns, paintball guns and other equipment within the ambit of the prohibitions. This would effectively prohibit many of the industries and activities that surround airsoft.

I understand that the bill in its current form is designed to curb the important problem of gun violence in Canada. However, in my view and in the view of many of my peers would mean a sudden and undeserved end to a popular hobby and sport.

While resembling real firearms, airsoft equipment actually poses less risk to personal safety than paintball markers and many other sports. Physical contact between players is minimal, the plastic bbs fired by airsoft guns usually weigh around a quarter of a gram or less, and provided participants wear eye protection, present no realistic possibility of bodily harm. The energy involved with an airsoft projectile is less than that of a paintball. In fact, airsoft and the

handling of air rifles is where many of the youth in Canada first have their experience with responsible firearms handling.

Drawing from the experiences of other countries, airsoft was a response to strict gun control laws like in Japan. Japanese policy makers allowed the manufacture and ownership of airsoft guns, recognizing that while they strongly resemble real firearms, they pose no threat to the public good and allow for collectors, reenactors, and athletes to participate legally and safely. Airsoft is presently allowing for a safe and positive environment that reduces gun violence by reducing the need or desire to own a real firearm. The low gun violence numbers in Japan are informative where airsoft is a national hobby and pastime.

Prohibiting airsoft guns may also unwittingly create black and grey markets for the many airsoft guns already in the country, spurring illegal and criminal activities where none existed before or may inadvertently create criminal liability for otherwise innocent individuals with a legitimate past-time.

Airsoft as a sport is growing within Canada, with more stores and more community engagement every year. Many former paintball players move over to airsoft, recognizing that it is cheaper, more fun, and safer than that sport. Many lawful owners of real firearms also play and own airsoft, recognizing that airsoft guns are a perfectly safe alternative to introducing firearms owners to safe handling and shooting practices.

In my view, proceeding with these prohibitions would be akin to prohibiting any movie, TV show, video game, podcast or newsletter, that features the use of firearms. Such a proposition would be unthinkable. My peers and I would see these new changes as dramatic as this. With the stroke of a pen these new changes may destroy the livelihoods of thousands of employees across the country and derail an industry that adds tens of millions of dollars to the Canadian economy. This is not to mention the impact the prohibition will have on those who play the game of airsoft, which, just like any other sport, enables the fostering of communities, friendships, and camaraderie. Like any sport, airsoft is an outlet, a way to have fun and be a part of something bigger. To capture airsoft or paintball under the ambit of these new rules would be overbroad because the projectiles pose little danger to the human body, it is one of the safest sports out there.

I would advocate for regulation of the hobby rather than a prohibition of it or the areas surrounding it. If a change is still deemed necessary, the federal government can also look at similar democracies to see what measures they have taken to make an already safe sport and hobby even safer. In the UK for instance, airsoft guns exist under a two-tiered system. A special license called a UKARA enables holders to own airsoft guns. Those without the license can still obtain airsoft guns, but the guns themselves must be painted in bright, two-tone colours to show that it is not a real firearm. This system has been highly successful in the UK, allowing airsoft owners and players to obtain and transfer airsoft guns in a responsible manner while also keeping the public good in mind.

Other democracies that allow the ownership of airsoft include France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. This list is by no means exhaustive. But all of these countries all share similar laws about the ownership and usage of real firearms. If they allow for airsoft, then so can Canada.

The relevant section of the bill in question should be carefully addressed, removed completely, or amended to exempt airsoft, paintball and air rifles. It does not protect the public, it does nothing to prevent gun-related crime, and will in fact cause direct harm to the many Canadians who enjoy airsoft for the safe sport and hobby that it is.

Your concerned constituent.
