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Press Release



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Governor Hassan's Statement on NH Attorney General's Letter to Courts on Background Checks

CONCORD – Governor Maggie Hassan issued the following statement on Attorney General Joseph Foster's letter to the New Hampshire Judicial Branch regarding the State's authority to make reports to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS):

"We must always work to keep New Hampshire's citizens safe from harm, and further aligning New Hampshire's reporting to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System with other states and federal guidelines is another step forward. This builds on our bipartisan work to pass Joshua's Law, creating a crime of domestic violence, and reporting those offenses to the background check system as well. By ensuring that the federal background check system includes comprehensive information about individuals who are already prohibited by federal law from possessing a weapon, we can help make our communities safer.

"Our bipartisan bill this year reauthorizing the New Hampshire Health Protection Program included a provision that specifically addressed this, authorizing New Hampshire to provide information to the background check system about a very limited group of individuals who should not be sold a firearm due to serious mental illness, such as those who have been found not guilty of a criminal offense by reason of insanity and those whom the court has found pose a danger to themselves or others.

"Almost all people with mental illness represent no danger to their families, their communities, or themselves, and in the instances when a court finds that an individual poses a risk, the greatest danger is often to the individual himself. New Hampshire saw more than 100 suicides by firearm in 2015, and a study by the Harvard School of Public Health has found that 85 percent of suicide attempts by firearm are fatal.

"In keeping with the federal law, this policy does not apply to the vast majority of people who experience mental illness, and we remain committed to preventing the stigmatization of those with mental illness and helping them access appropriate treatment. At the same time, this common-sense step will help prevent those who are a danger to themselves or others from purchasing firearms, strengthening public safety.

"I thank Attorney General Foster and his staff for their commitment to the safety of our communities and for providing clear direction to New Hampshire's judicial branch on reporting to the background check system as it was authorized by bipartisan legislation. I also join the Attorney General's call for the legislature to develop a common-sense system that will allow individuals to petition to be removed from the background check system when they have undergone treatment."

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