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April 25, 2013

Councilmember Mitchell Englander
Councilmember Jan Perry
Councilmember Joe Buscaino
Councilmember Paul Krekorian
Councilmember Dennis Zine
CITY OF LOS ANGELES
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, California 90012
VIA FAX, EMAIL & U. S. MAIL

Re: **Opposition to File No. 13-0068: "Large-Capacity Magazines"**

Dear Public Safety Committee Members:

We write on behalf of our clients, the National Rifle Association ("NRA") and the California Rifle and Pistol Association ("CRPA"), as well as the hundreds of thousands of their members in California, including members in the City of Los Angeles (the "City").

Our clients oppose the proposed ordinance declaring any "large-capacity magazine" within the City to be a public nuisance and consequently subjecting such magazines to confiscation and summary destruction by the Los Angeles Police Department. With the Public Safety Committee scheduled to hear this proposal at its April 26, 2013 meeting, we accordingly write to share our clients' comments regarding the legal ramifications of adopting the proposed ordinance before the Public Safety Committee decides to act.

First, by declaring that the very same "large-capacity magazines" the Penal Code defines as nuisances are also nuisances within the City, the proposed ordinance unconstitutionally duplicates state law. Second, as worded, the proposed ordinance does not make *all*¹ "large-

¹ That is, all "large-capacity magazines" whose manufacture, import, sale, gift, or loan is not already statutorily exempt pursuant to Penal Code Sections 17700-17745 and 32400-32450.

capacity magazines” within the City to be nuisances. Third, even if the proposed ordinance seeks to declare *all* “large-capacity magazines” within the City to be nuisances, it is preempted from doing so by the comprehensive state law scheme in this field. Finally, the proposed ordinance disregards the protection the Second Amendment affords to arms in common use.

I. The Proposed Ordinance Unconstitutionally Duplicates State Law

The proposed ordinance cannot declare that those “large-capacity magazines” that might already be a nuisance under state law are likewise a nuisance within the City without running afoul of the constitution. “[A] local ordinance cannot prohibit exactly the same thing prohibited by the state law and still be valid.” *Ex Parte Daniels*, 183 Cal. 636, 645 (1920). “The invalidity arises, not from a conflict of language, but from the inevitable conflict of jurisdiction which would result from dual regulations covering the same ground.” *Piploy v. Benson*, 20 Cal.2d 366, 371 (1942).

Because provisions of the proposed ordinance seek to “punish[] the same act denounced by state law,” *Abbott v. City of Los Angeles*, 53 Cal.2d 674, 682 (1960), the ordinance is invalid under duplication preemption. Specifically, the ordinance declares that the very same “large-capacity magazines” that state law would already define as nuisances would likewise be nuisances within Los Angeles. The ordinance then adds that these “nuisance” “large-capacity magazines”—which would already be subject to confiscation and destruction under state law—are subject to confiscation and destruction under Los Angeles City law as well. This proposal is “substantially identical with [the] state statute,” prohibiting “exactly the same conduct.” *Pipoly*, 20 Cal.2d at 370; *Great Western*, 27 Cal.4th at 865-66. By duplicating state law, the proposed ordinance is therefore preempted.

The minor differences in geographical scope between the ordinance and statute will not forestall preemption. After all, ordinances always vary from state law in scope—ordinances are confined to city limits, state laws are not. If a city could immunize itself by simply arguing that its ordinance applies only within its borders, duplication preemption would never apply. Indeed, California courts have found duplication where an ordinance was narrower or broader in scope than state law. *See, e.g., Cohen v. Board of Supervisors*, 40 Cal.3d 277, 292 (1985) (striking ordinance forbidding escorts from engaging in criminal conduct with customers as duplicative of state law which forbids criminal acts against any victim, not just an escort’s customer); *In re Portnoy*, 21 Cal.2d 237, 241-42 (1942) (invalidating ordinance banning slot machines as duplicative of state law even though the ordinance applied to persons and places not reached by the Penal Code section prohibiting slot machines). Therefore, the slight differences between the proposed ordinance and state law—namely, that the ordinance is confined to Los Angeles and labels “large-capacity magazines” as *public* nuisances whereas the Penal Code simply speaks of “nuisances”²—will not save the ordinance from duplication preemption.

² The proposed ordinance’s classifying “large-capacity magazines” as *public* nuisances is unremarkable. The Penal Code already authorizes government attorneys—i.e. the Attorney General, district attorney, or city attorney—to bring an action to enjoin nuisance items. Cal. Penal

II. On Its Face, the Proposed Ordinance Does Not Make “Large-Capacity Magazines” Acquired Prior to 2000 Nuisances

The proposed ordinance states that the “City Council finds that *any* large-capacity magazine, as defined in Section 16740 of the California Penal Code, that is subject to Section 32390 of the California Penal Code is, and hereby declares it to be, a public nuisance and an immediate threat to the public health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Los Angeles.” (emphasis added).

Although not entirely clear, the proposed ordinance appears to rest on the premise that *all* “large-capacity magazines” constitute a nuisance under California Penal Code Section 32390 and, as a result, *any* such magazine within the City may be declared a nuisance and subject to summary destruction by the Los Angeles Police Department.³ That premise is invalid.

Section 32390 became operative on January 1, 2012 as part of legislation to “reorganize *without substantive change* the provisions of the Penal Code relating to deadly weapons.”⁴ To determine which “large-capacity magazines” might constitute a nuisance under the Penal Code, if any, it is therefore necessary to examine the statutory scheme *prior to* its non-substantive reorganization.

In 1999, Senate Bill 23 amended Section 12020(a) of the Penal Code to add the prohibition on manufacture, import, sale, gift, or loan of “large-capacity magazines.” This bill carefully noted that it “would make it a crime to do anything with detachable large-capacity magazines after January 1, 2000—*except possess and personally use them . . .*.”⁵

The limited nature of this legislation is significant for determining which, if any, magazines constitute a nuisance under the Penal Code. Before the Penal Code was renumbered without substantive change, items listed as prohibited in previous Section 12020(a) were also declared nuisances under previous Section 12029.⁶ For example, Section 12029 specifically

Code § 18010. Given that the government is not involved in *private* nuisance actions, *see People v. Palmer*, 86 Cal.App.4th 781, 796 n.1 (Ct. App. 2001), the proposed ordinance is stating anything not already contemplated by the Legislature.

³ See Draft Ordinance, File No. 13-0068, at 2 (“Whereas, any large-capacity magazine is a nuisance under California Penal Code Section 32390 and subject to confiscation and summary destruction wherever found within the state”).

⁴ SB 1080, 2010 Cal. Stat. ch. 711 (emphasis added).

⁵ Sen. Comm. Pub. Safety, SB 23, 1999 Cal. Stat. ch. 129 p. 7 (emphasis added).

⁶ Section 12029 reads, in relevant part: “Except as provided in Section 12020, blackjacks, slungshots, billies, nunchakus, sandclubs, sandbags, shurikens, metal knuckles, short-barreled

declares that “blackjacks, slungshots, billies, nunchakus, sandclubs, sandbags, shurikens, metal knuckles, short-barreled shotguns or short-barreled rifles ... are nuisances.” And because it is illegal to *possess* each of these specific items under Section 12020(a)(1)⁷, this nuisance statute logically provides that their possession may be enjoined and that *all* blackjacks, slungshots, billies, nunchakus (et cetera) are subject to summary destruction.

For items not specifically listed in Section 12029 as nuisances, the statute effectively provides a “catch-all”: “any other item which is listed in subdivision (a) of Section 12020 . . .” is likewise a nuisance. Illustratively, although “any flechette dart” or “any leaded cane” is not specifically listed as a nuisance in Section 12029, any flechette dart or leaded cane is prohibited under Section 12020(a)(1). Because it is illegal to possess a flechette dart or leaded cane, Section 12029 provides that they may be deemed a nuisance, their possession may be enjoined, and they may be summarily destroyed.

This is not the case with “large-capacity magazines.” Unlike all blackjacks, billies, and flechette darts or leaded canes—whose *possession is illegal*—“large-capacity magazines” *are* perfectly legal to possess (at least those acquired prior to January 1, 2000). And because their *possession* is legal, Section 12029 never even contemplated them to be a nuisance. Nuisances under Section 12029, after all, are limited only to those items listed in Section 12020(a). Because the only “large-capacity magazines” spoken of in Section 12020(a) are those that are manufactured, imported, sold, gifted, or loaned after January 1, 2000, and because all of Section 12020 is silent as to *possessed* “large-capacity magazines,” such magazines cannot constitute nuisances. Instead, consistent with the Penal Code’s internal logic, the only “large-capacity magazines” that might arguably constitute a nuisance are those that are manufactured, imported, given, or sold after January 1, 2000.⁸ Thus, although Section 32390 provides that all “large-

shotguns or short-barreled rifles . . . and any other item which is listed in subdivision (a) of Section 12020 and is not listed in subdivision (a) of Section 12028 are nuisances, and the Attorney General, district attorney, or city attorney may bring an action to enjoin the manufacture of, importation of, keeping for sale of, offering or exposing for sale, giving, lending, or possession of, any of the forgoing items. These weapons shall be subject to confiscation and summary destruction whenever found within the state.”

⁷ “Any person in this state who does any of the following is punishable by imprisonment . . . [m]anufactures or causes to be manufactured, imports into the state, keeps for sale, or offers or exposes for sale, or who gives, lends, or *possesses* any . . . nunchaku, any short-barreled shotgun, any short-barreled rifle, any metal knuckles . . . any shuriken . . . [or any] blackjack, slungshot, billy, sandclub [or] sandbag.”

⁸ It is unclear whether the Legislature even intended that *any* “large-capacity magazine” should constitute a nuisance. Revealingly, Section 12029 was last substantively amended in 1988—eleven years before the “large-capacity magazine” statutes were added to the Penal Code. This certainly forecloses any argument that the Legislature specifically contemplated the summary destruction of lawfully possessed “large-capacity magazines” as a Section 12029

capacity magazines” are nuisances, this was an unintended, and non-binding, substantive restructuring that resulted when reorganizing the Penal Code. Our office is currently in communications with the Law Revision Commission to rectify this oversight.

III. If the Proposed Ordinance Is Interpreted to Cover “Large-Capacity Magazines” Acquired Prior to 2000, the Ordinance Is Preempted by State Law

A local ordinance that encroaches in an area of law already impliedly occupied by the Legislature will be stricken as unconstitutional. State law impliedly preempts local regulation under any of the three following circumstances:

(1) [T]he subject matter has been so fully and completely covered by general law as to clearly indicate that it has become exclusively a matter of state concern; (2) the subject matter has been partially covered by general law couched in such terms as to indicate clearly that a paramount state concern will not tolerate further or additional local action; or (3) the subject matter has been partially covered by general law, and the subject is of such a nature that the adverse effect of a local ordinance on the transient citizens of the state outweighs the possible benefit to the locality.

Fiscal v. City and County of San Francisco, 158 Cal.App.4th 895, 904 (Ct. App. 2008). With respect to “large-capacity magazines,” state law preempts the proposed ordinance under each of these tests.

First, “large-capacity magazines” are fully and completely regulated under the Penal Code, thereby foreclosing any local interference with the state statutory scheme (except that which was expressly authorized). Indeed, sixteen different statutes *specifically* concern “large-capacity magazines.”⁹ And because a “large-capacity magazine” is also a “generally prohibited weapon” under Penal Code section 16590, an additional eight statutes apply.¹⁰ In sum, twenty-four state statutes govern “large-capacity magazines,” providing a broad and comprehensive regulatory regime. Woven into this intricate statutory scheme are numerous exceptions to the general “large-capacity magazine” transfer prohibition. *See, e.g.*, Cal. Penal Code § 12020(b)(27) (exempting the “sale of, giving of, lending of, importation into this state of, or purchase of, any large-capacity magazine, to or by entities that operate armored vehicle businesses pursuant to the laws of this state.”). These exceptions revealingly do not speak to the *possession* of large-capacity magazines as lawful under specified circumstances—because the law was never intended

nuisance. This letter thus assumes—but does not concede—that if the Legislature ever intended for a “large-capacity magazine” to constitute a nuisance, it is limited only to those magazines manufactured, imported, given, or sold within the state after January 1, 2000.

⁹ See Cal. Penal Code §§ 16740; 18010; 32310; 32315; 32390; 32400; 32405; 32410; 32415; 32420; 32425; 32430; 32435; 32440; 32445; 32450.

¹⁰ See Cal. Penal Code §§ 16590; 17715; 17720; 17725; 17730; 17735; 17745; 17800.

to prohibit possession of large-capacity magazines.

Indeed, under the “large-capacity magazine” statutes, the Legislature has already specifically provided—albeit unclearly—which “large-capacity magazines” might constitute a nuisance under state law. What is clear, however, is that not *all* “large-capacity magazines” are nuisances under state law. *See* Part II, *supra*. The Legislature clearly intended to leave untouched the possession of such magazines that people had obtained prior to the adoption of 12020(a)(2) in 2000. The proposed ordinance may not, therefore, ignore state law and declare *all* “large-capacity magazines” a nuisance within the City without “completely frustrat[ing] a broad, evolutionary statutory regime enacted by the Legislature.” *Fiscal*, 158 Cal.App.4th at 911.

Second, statutory nuisance actions for “large-capacity magazines” are couched in such terms as to indicate clearly that a paramount state concern will not tolerate further or additional local action. The exceptions to “large-capacity magazine” restrictions provided in the Penal Code are worded in a way that do not contemplate additional local regulation (beyond the limited nuisance actions mentioned in the previous paragraph). Consider, for example: state law already declares that a “large-capacity magazine” that was lawfully possessed within the state prior to January 1, 2000, subsequently taken out of the state, and then returned to the state is *not* a nuisance.¹¹ However, a local ordinance that declares *all* “large-capacity magazines” a nuisance, would mean a “large-capacity magazine” that was lawfully possessed prior to January 1, 2000 but that continuously remained in the state *is* a nuisance and *may* be summarily destroyed. The Legislature intended to avoid such absurd results by so fully describing in what scenarios *possession* of a “large-capacity magazine” would not be subject to restriction.

Finally, a local ordinance that declares *all* “large-capacity magazines” nuisances is impliedly preempted because its immense adverse effect on transient citizens far exceeds any purported benefit to a locality. As previously noted, state law already provides that certain “large-capacity magazines” may be freely imported in and out of the state and are not nuisances. If a local government is nonetheless permitted to declare such magazines nuisances, their possessors will be confronted with a patchwork quilt of different “large-capacity magazine” restrictions each time they enter another jurisdiction. Consequently, should a locality bordering another state enact such an ordinance, “large-capacity magazines” would be forbidden to pass through to exit or enter the state.

As the California Court of Appeal has warned, when it comes to regulating firearms and ammunition, “*local governments are well advised to tread lightly.*” *Fiscal*, 158 Cal.App.4th at 919 (emphasis added). Tellingly, local governments virtually never attempt to regulate the possession of types of firearms and firearms components allowed for under state law.

¹¹ *See* Cal. Penal Code § 32390 (“large-capacity magazine” exceptions under Sections 32400-32450 are not nuisances); Cal. Penal Code § 32420 (“large-capacity magazines” lawfully possessed in the state prior to January 1, 2000, lawfully taken out of the state, and then returned to the state are not illegal).

IV. The Proposed Ordinance Violates the Second Amendment

The Supreme Court's decision in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570, 624-25 (2008), is clear that arms "typically possessed by law-abiding citizens for lawful purposes" or those "in common use" are protected by the Second Amendment. That protection surely extends to commonly used ammunition feeding devices—i.e. magazines—which are necessary for the meaningful exercise of the right. *Cf. Andrews v. State*, 50 Tenn. 165, 178 (1871); *see also Bateman v. Perdue*, 881 F. Supp. 2d 709, 714 (E.D. N.C. 2012). Because the lawful use of "large-capacity magazines" is exceedingly common, magazines that are lawfully possessed cannot be declared a public nuisance and subject to confiscation. Because the proposed ordinance would be a more egregious abridgement of the constitution than state law, its adoption will make the City a prime target for litigation of this issue.

V. CONCLUSION

Our office is available to discuss in further detail the nuanced preemption issues raised by this ordinance. Adoption of this ordinance will result in immediate litigation against the City of Los Angeles to enjoin enforcement and have it declared invalid. For the foregoing reasons, we strongly urge the Public Safety Committee to reject this proposal.

Sincerely,
Michel & Associates, P. C.



C. D. Michel

CDM/ca

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Please take a moment of your time to read the attached letter before your meeting tomorrow morning.

Thank you

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