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(SAN FRANCISCO) – The Firearms Law Center, a national project of Legal Community Against Violence, launched a new web site Monday designed to help communities across America develop their own gun regulations.

The interactive site, www.firearmslawcenter.org, offers a comprehensive look at state and local gun laws, direct links to anti-violence groups in each state, and links to other groups with expertise in crafting gun legislation.

“President Bush has said there will be no new federal gun legislation during his term, but that doesn’t have to be the final word on the subject,” said Barrie Becker, executive director of LCAV and the Firearms Law Center. “We’ve helped more than 100 cities and counties in California pass local ordinances that have helped reduce firearm-related injuries and death. We want to help other states do the same.”

In addition to California, approximately 15 states have laws that allow cities and counties latitude in enacting gun regulations, including Colorado, Illinois and Ohio, states many experts, including Becker, see as pivotal venues ripe for assistance such as that offered by Firearms Law Center.

“Our site allows anyone to click on his or her state, find out what types of regulations are permitted, what kinds of regulations have already been passed statewide, and what they can do to enact ordinances to make their communities safer,” Becker said.

Some states and localities, for example, have passed gun laws requiring background checks at gun shows; mandating that all handguns be sold with state-of-the-art, child-proof locks; banning the sale of assault weapons (those manufactured prior to the federal manufacturing ban); and otherwise regulating guns, ammunition and accessories.

In Colorado, residents have shown a keen interest in gun safety measures in the wake of the Columbine High School shootings. After the state legislature refused to do so, Colorado voters passed Amendment 22 last year, which requires a background check before a gun can be sold at a public gun show. At the same time, however, the pro-gun lobby has stepped up its efforts in the state, Becker noted.

Illinois is home to some of the first communities in the country to ban handguns, yet this year bills were introduced in the state legislature that would have legalized the carrying of concealed handguns and preempted all local regulation of firearms. A bill requiring state licensing of firearms dealers died after a tie vote in the Illinois House.

Ohio, in particular, is a state that hangs in the balance, Becker said. A trio of bills introduced this spring in the state legislature would entitle most Ohioans to carry concealed weapons and grant gun manufacturers immunity in court. And most importantly, Becker said, the state still hasn't mandated background checks for those purchasing firearms at gun shows.

"This is where cities and counties can develop legislation to close that loophole," Becker said.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 30,708 Americans died from firearms-related injuries in 1998, the last year for which statistics are available. Firearms injuries are the second leading cause of injury deaths nationwide, surpassed only by motor vehicle injuries.¹

"This is about identifying effective laws that will save lives," Becker said. "Supporters of our efforts include gun owners, Republicans and Democrats alike. Our approach is not anti-gun. It is designed to protect public safety."

Lawmakers welcomed the site as a much-needed advance. "By making information about local efforts to regulate gun laws more accessible, the Firearms Law Center has helped dozens of communities around the nation develop an effective local response to gun violence," said Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California. "I applaud their efforts and hope that it will help more local communities close the loopholes in our nation's gun laws."

The Firearms Law Center web site debuts on the anniversary of a horrific shooting in downtown San Francisco eight years ago that left nine people dead and five wounded. On July 1, 1993, a disgruntled former client walked into a high-rise office tower at 101 California St. and began spraying the offices of Pettit & Martin law firm (now defunct) with assault weapon fire. The gunman killed himself as police closed in on him in a stairwell.

LCAV formed in response to the shooting. The nonprofit's mission is to empower communities to develop policies at all levels of government that will save lives.

For more information about Firearms Law Center and Legal Community Against Violence, contact Barrie Becker, executive director, or Andy Spafford, senior staff attorney, at (415) 433-2062. Or, visit www.firearmslawcenter.org.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics Reports, *Deaths: Final Data for 1998* (July 24, 2000).