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Chicago suburb of Lyons, sued over gun sales, passes ordinance to increase oversight

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LYONS, Illinois — The Chicago suburb of Lyons, one of three Illinois communities sued earlier this year for alleged weak oversight of gun stores, passed a new ordinance Tuesday that spells out procedures for more closely monitoring firearms sales.

Among the plaintiffs in the lawsuit filed in July are two mothers who lost sons to gun violence, ministers and an activist group. They accused Lyons and the suburbs of Riverdale and Lincolnwood of violating the civil rights of residents in Chicago's largely African-American neighborhoods by failing to take steps to make sure gun stores are not selling firearms to people who should not be allowed to carry them.

"The new ordinance approved today spells out a strategy to help prevent straw buyers from purchasing guns that end up in the hands of criminals," Lyons Mayor Christopher Getty said.

Attorney Michael Persoon, who is representing the plaintiffs, said Lyons would be dropped from the litigation.

"This ordinance shows that once again there is no problem that is so intractable that we can't do something about it when we put our mind to it as a society," Persoon told the Chicago Tribune. "What it takes is the political courage to confront a problem and the political will to do something about it."

In filing the lawsuit, the plaintiffs pointed to a Chicago Police Department study that showed between 2009 and 2013, 2,000 guns sold in the stores in Riverdale and Lyons were used in crimes. But they also said that the communities can dramatically reduce the flow of illegal guns if they are required to do such things as install surveillance cameras and train employees on how to stop straw purchasers, who buy legally guns and provide them to criminals.

The ordinance passed Tuesday calls for close cooperation between the village of Lyons and its lone gun shop, Midwest Sporting Goods.

The gun shop must keep electronic records of anyone who purchases more than one firearm within a 12-month period. Records and documents must be turned over to local law enforcement within 48 hours if the gun shop determines the potential buyer is not a "valid or lawful" purchaser.

The ordinance also requires the shop to maintain a "do not sell" list of people who purchased a gun that was later traced to a crime.

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Illinois State Rifle Association executive director Richard Pearson said he doesn't support the ordinance.

"That person may not have had anything to do with the crime. Maybe their firearm was stolen," he said. "Legitimate gun owners could go on the list, and they didn't do anything wrong."

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