



For Immediate Release

Contact: Rita Smith, NCADV Executive Director
303-839-1852, x105

Momentous Supreme Court Ruling Will Save Lives

March 26, 2014: The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) applauds the Supreme Court in ruling today that people convicted of minor domestic violence offenses can be barred from possessing guns. They also ruled that this law can be enforced even in states where no proof of physical force is required to support the domestic violence charge.

"This ruling will literally save lives," says NCADV executive director, Rita Smith. "A woman's risk of being killed increases by 500% when a gun is present in domestic violence situations – not fifty percent, not one hundred percent – **Five Hundred Percent**. Prohibiting convicted batterers from possessing guns is just simple common sense and we are thrilled that the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that federal law supports this."

The ruling stemmed from the case, *United States vs. Castleman*, in which James Alvin Castleman plead guilty to misdemeanor domestic assault in Tennessee in 2001. In his case, it was alleged that he intentionally or knowingly caused bodily injury to the mother of his child. Seven years later, it was discovered that Castleman and his wife were buying firearms and selling them on the black market.

Today, the Supreme Court ruled that this is indeed not okay, regardless of Castleman's efforts to convince a federal court that he was not guilty of illegal gun possession

because his guilty plea for a Tennessee domestic violence offense did not qualify under federal law because of the way domestic violence is defined by Tennessee statute.

Domestic violence is defined differently by law in different states; however, the Court upheld that even more minor forms of physical force used in violent relationships constitutes misdemeanor offenses and should be taken seriously. While misdemeanor domestic violence offenses often consist of more minor acts such as pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, and hitting compared to public understanding of more extreme violent acts against a stranger, it is important to understand that these smaller acts of violence are used by abusers over time to establish control and dominance over an intimate partner and frequently build in severity. For US women, this too often means the violence will get worse. Add a gun to the mix and the likelihood of their being killed with that gun by their abusive partner increases exponentially.

Rita Smith continues, "We cannot express enough how important this ruling was today. Any other ruling would have significantly undermined women's safety. Knowing that more than half of female intimate partners are more likely to be killed by a gun than any other weapon, today feels like an incredible victory."

The survivor-led and survivor-focused National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) has worked for more than thirty-five years to end violence against women by raising awareness and educating the public about the effects of domestic abuse. Our work includes developing and sustaining ground-breaking public policy at the national level aimed at ending violence; assisting the 2,000+ urban and rural shelters and programs at the local, state, and regional levels of the nation in the programming they offer to victims seeking safety and assistance; and offering programming that empowers and supports the long-term health and safety of victims of domestic violence. Currently, our constituency encompasses more than 70,000 programs, survivors, advocates, and allied individuals and is growing daily. Learn more about us at: www.ncadv.org.

###