Strengthening the Microstamping Law
AB 876 (Gabriel)

Assembly Bill 876, introduced by Assembly Member Jesse Gabriel, ensures that all law enforcement handguns will have microstamping technology by 2023. Mandating microstamping technology for law enforcement weapons will provide transparency, accountability, and ensure that law enforcement officials are utilizing safer and higher quality firearms.

WHAT IS MICROSTAMPING TECHNOLOGY?

Microstamping technology imprints unique markings onto the tip of a firing pin and/or breech face of a firearm. These markings link to specific information about the gun, including the serial number and the last legal purchaser. When a microstamping-equipped firearm discharges a bullet, this information is stamped onto the bullet casings. If a fired casing is recovered at a crime scene, it can then be connected to the identifying information about the firearm. This is similar to the way law enforcement can use an automobile’s license plate to identify the vehicle’s make, model, VIN, and registered owner.

Importantly, microstamping technology is available, reliable, feasible, and inexpensive; it could have a significant impact on criminal investigations.

MICROSTAMPING IS CALIFORNIA LAW

The already existing Unsafe Handgun Act (UHA) requires that all new semi-automatic pistol models incorporate microstamping technology. Unfortunately, the gun industry has effectively boycotted this law by refusing to develop new handgun models for sale in California. To date, no firearm manufacturer has submitted a handgun for certification to the California Department of Justice that incorporates microstamping technology.

A significant portion of law enforcement is exempt from the UHA requirements. Numerous law enforcement officials have used their UHA exemptions to purchase handguns that lack microstamping technology and then sell these handguns, illegally, to the general public at vast profits.

AB 876 WILL IMPROVE POLICE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY STATEWIDE

AB 876 will increase law enforcement transparency and set the stage for widespread microstamping use by requiring microstamping technology for all handguns owned by any state, local, or other law enforcement agency. It will also include firearms used, possessed, or otherwise carried by a state, county, city, city and county, or other peace officer while on duty.
California faces mounting issues from a lack of transparency regarding officer-involved shootings and from the exemptions for law enforcement officials to purchase, use, and sell unsafe handguns under the UHA.

After a police-involved shooting, identifying which officers fired their weapons may not be determined until extensive and time-consuming firearm forensic ballistic tests are completed. Mandating that law enforcement officials in the field use firearms equipped with microstamping technology, however, will provide a new level of transparency into officer-involved shootings, help provide closure to victims and accountability for officer conduct, and will bring law enforcement requirements in line with those imposed on the public they serve.

Additionally, AB 876 will address the current practice of some law enforcement officials’ use of UHA exemptions to purchase handguns that lack microstamping technology and then pocketing vast profits by selling these handguns, illegally, to the general public. Finally, requiring law enforcement agencies to use microstamping technology will set an important precedent for firearm owners and gun manufacturers and will incentivize the gun industry to introduce new, safe firearms for sale in California.

Passing AB 876 and making it California law will help restore confidence in and improve accountability of law enforcement, and will also provide the gun industry with a stronger financial incentive to incorporate life-saving microstamping technology into firearms purchased in California.