

Chicago's handgun ban in spotlight

Both sides speak out as fight goes to Supreme Court

By Cynthia Dizikes and Hal Dardick

TRIBUNE REPORTERS

At the age of 15, Monica Sanders answered her phone to learn that her friend had been fatally shot in the stomach by another female teen, leaving behind a 4-month-old daughter.

"It still shocks me to this day," said Sanders, now 18. "It's insane that a teenager could get a gun."

The senseless act of violence prompted Sanders to join Hands Without Guns, a violence-prevention group that joined a cacophony of local voices Monday on the eve of arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court about whether to strike down Chicago's long-standing handgun ban.

On one side, gun-control groups argue that lifting the decades-old ban will increase the prevalence of guns and the level of violence that Chicago-area students such as Sanders face daily. On the other side, gun-rights groups have said the prohibition prevents law-abiding citizens from protecting themselves. They also point out that the illegal gun trade has continued to flourish in Chicago despite the ban.

Both sides, however, agree on this much: McDonald v. Chicago will be a landmark case regarding



Chicago teens Eddie Bland, left, Monica Sanders and Briana Brooks participate at the Uhlich Children's Advantage Network news conference Monday in Chicago. HEATHER CHARLES/TRIBUNE PHOTO

the "right to keep and bear arms." As the nine justices decide whether the Second Amendment can be used to strike down gun restrictions on state and local levels, their opinion stands to have far-reaching impact.

Mayor Richard Daley, who has frequently decried the toll of handgun violence, contends the federal government does too little to address the issue for fear of the powerful gun lobby.

"We've turned our backs on

common-sense gun laws in America and we continuously, unfortunately, continue shooting each other on a daily basis," Daley told reporters.

At a separate news conference where Sanders spoke, Uhlich Children's Advantage Network, a Chicago youth-advocacy group, pointed to its national Teen Gun Survey as proof of that argument. The survey, which is conducted annually, found that more than one in four teens claim to know

someone who has been shot, and one in three say they could get a handgun if they really wanted to obtain one.

Gun-rights activists have argued that striking down the Chicago gun ban would actually lead to safer neighborhoods by giving citizens the ability to arm and defend themselves. They also say the prohibition infringes on their fundamental right to bear arms.

"Allowing law-abiding citizens, responsible adults, the right to

Public face of gun rights

Meet Otis McDonald of McDonald v. City of Chicago: chicagotribune.com/handgun

keep handguns in their homes is not going to make (violence) any worse; it will likely make it better," said Mike Weisman of the Illinois State Rifle Association, which is a plaintiff in the case.

Many legal experts say Chicago is fighting an uphill battle. The nation's top court has typically determined that the Bill of Rights applies to states and municipalities—not just the federal government.

A decision is expected by late June. But if Chicago's law is overturned, that won't be the end of the debate. In fact, experts say it will open the door to much more litigation. In striking down a gun ban in Washington, D.C., justices did not close the door on all gun regulation. Washington later enacted a law requiring gun owners to go through five hours of safety training, register their firearms every three years and undergo criminal background checks every six years.

"This case is just the first step," said Valinda Rowe, spokeswoman for IllinoisCarry.com, a group that favors the legalization of carrying weapons.

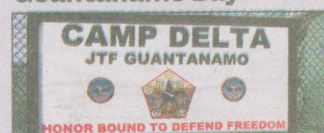
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Balls in the court

A look at some of the significant issues the U.S. Supreme Court has taken up in recent weeks.

SOURCES: News reports
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Guantanamo Bay



Case: Kiyemba v. Obama

Summary: The court on Monday dismissed a challenge to the government's handling of prisoners in the case of seven Chinese Muslims, or Uighurs, still detained at Guantanamo Bay. The prisoners argued that federal judges should have the power to release detainees when the detainees have nowhere to go.

Enron



Case: Skilling v. U.S.

Summary: Lawyers for former Enron CEO Jeffrey Skilling argued Monday that Skilling did not receive a fair trial in Houston in 2006 when he was convicted of conspiracy, securities fraud, lying to auditors and insider trading. Skilling also argues that the law under which he was convicted is unfair.

Campaign finance



Case: Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission

Summary: The court's January ruling lifted limits on the amount of money corporations can spend on political ads, drawing criticism from the White House and political groups. Two Democratic senators last week introduced a constitutional amendment that would undo the ruling.

Handguns



Case: McDonald v. Chicago

Summary: The court is scheduled to hear arguments Tuesday on whether Chicago's ban on handguns violates the U.S. Constitution. Two years ago the court struck down a similar ban in Washington, D.C., but because this case challenges local ordinances, a ruling could pave the way for more lawsuits nationwide.