

A gun control proposal that everyone should support

By: Ken Braun – March 16, 2013

Thomas Torres, age 54, was the target of a Connecticut State Police SWAT raid shortly before Christmas two years ago. The Spanish-speaking, subsidized housing resident of New Haven was living in a building infested with drug dealers and prostitutes. He kept his door closed unless given a damn good reason to do otherwise.

He didn't have the drugs the police were looking for and told them so, repeatedly, despite the language barrier, after the raiding party knocked down his door. What followed was the trashing of his apartment and a physical altercation between the unarmed middle-aged man on disability and several officers that somehow managed to leave Torres with a badly bruised face and broken arm. No drugs were found. Torres wasn't charged with any offense - not even assaulting an officer or attempting to flee - but the cops did helpfully get an ambulance for him.

By one estimate, cited by the Cato Institute, American citizens have their homes and private property invaded 40,000 times per year by their government's use of paramilitary police raids. There are obviously cases where SWAT teams are sent after clearly dangerous and violent criminals that need to spend many years in a cage.

But these home invasions are too often used against non-violent drug offenders, sometimes in situations - such as the Torres matter - where there isn't even a clear crime being committed. Most alarmingly, they can also happen when bad information and mistakes send cops to the wrong doors.

When there's 109 military assaults on Americans each day, mistakes happen. An elderly couple in Brooklyn recently suffered through 50 visits from police when a computer glitch in the NYPD's database repeatedly dispatched cops to their home looking for various evildoers.

How often are mistakes made?

That's a hard thing to find out: Police don't often keep a public record and don't want to. Because raids often happen in neighborhoods where poor, powerless citizens like Torres live, even the bad cases can stay out of the public eye. If the wrong door gets kicked in, but nobody is roughed up and they don't know who to complain to anyway, then who but the victim and the cops will ever know?

During the last session of the Michigan Legislature, conservative State Rep. Tom McMillin, R-Rochester Hills, tried to change this with House Bill 4857. It would have

required a twice-yearly report from every SWAT team in Michigan. They would need to list the location of each raid, the legal reason for it, the details of what happened, whether shots were fired, what was seized and who was arrested. A similar law in Maryland revealed that 4.5 homes per day were being raided.

McMillin introduced the bill following the death of a 7-year old Detroit girl who was killed during a Detroit police SWAT raid on her home. The only weapon fired was from the gun of one of the officers, who claimed (falsely) that the girl's aunt reached for his weapon. Yet his only shot struck the little girl in the neck.

The bill received only two co-sponsors, both Detroit Democrats. It never got out of committee, allegedly due to strong resistance from law enforcement.

It is unclear whether Rep. McMillin will introduce the bill again this session. He should. If our current gun control debate leads to more firearm background checks on law abiding citizens, then the least our government owes us is a public background check when it points its guns at us.