

## **GUN PETITION FALLING SHORT, BACKERS SAY**

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*The Salt Lake Tribune. Salt Lake City, Utah: May 18, 2000. pg. A.1.*

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A citizen effort to ban guns in Utah schools and churches may be fizzling.

Supporters of a petition drive to place the gun issue before voters in November acknowledged Wednesday that they may not get the 70,000 signatures needed before the June 1 deadline.

"We are quite a ways away from the needed signatures," said Kim DeMille, coordinator of the effort. She declined to reveal how many signatures have been collected, however.

A last-ditch effort to salvage the initiative will be launched Saturday when volunteers will gather signatures at many Utah libraries. Supporters have purchased \$20,000 worth of advertisements from Utah newspapers and radio stations to publicize the event, and they hope for a huge turnout.

"This will be a major push," said Bill Nash, chairman of Utahns Against Gun Violence. "We are very concerned."

Other members of the "Safe to Learn, Safe to Worship" coalition are Utah State Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), Utah Education Association, Utah State Board of Regents, Episcopal Diocese of Utah, Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City, Intermountain Pediatric Academy, Primary Children's Medical Center, Utah Children, State Office of Education and League of Women Voters.

The problem, Nash said, is that backers of the effort underestimated the amount of work needed to organize and motivate thousands of volunteers around the state. About 5,000 petitions were sent to supporters, but there was little follow-up to assure they were circulated widely among voters. Many people appear to have done little to gather signatures.

When petitions are made available, Nash said, it is easy to get people to sign. "My experience is if you ask 25 people, 20 will sign it, five will say no and one will give you an argument."

DeMille said those infrequent arguments have frightened away some supporters.

"PTA moms have been hammered by gun fanatics who think this is a Second Amendment issue, rather than a common-sense safety issue," she said. "This has been a huge problem."

The Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution says: "A well- regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

Janalee Tobias, president of Utah-based Women Against Gun Control, called the gun issue an emotional one in which debate should be expected.

"What a bunch of crybabies," she said. "Maybe those PTA moms ought to get back into the kitchen and bake some cookies."

Rather than blaming the volunteers, she said initiative supporters should face the fact that few Utahns want to sign the petition.

"The teachers I have worked with say guns are the least of the problems in schools today," Tobias said. "They would have more support if they were out there with a petition to get lower class sizes, or if they had a petition trying to get more moms to work in the schools."

People who want to sign the petitions can stop by most of the main libraries along the Wasatch Front and in Tooele and St. George from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday.

A list of locations and full text of the initiative is on the Web site [www.safeutah.org](http://www.safeutah.org).

"It will be an extra step for people to stop by the library," said Dee Roland, from the Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City, "but we wanted to give it our best shot -- no pun intended."

DeMille said if the 70,000 signatures are not gathered in time for this November's election, the group might try to get the measure on the 2002 ballot.

Another option is that only about 37,000 signatures would be needed to force the Legislature to consider the measure in its next session.

Lawmakers in the past have shown no interest in banning guns from schools and churches. That is why the petition drive was started.

#### Other Initiative Petition Drives

The gun measure isn't the only initiative being circulated throughout the state. Two other active initiatives also must meet a June 1 deadline for getting the required number of signatures. They are the "English as the Official Language of Utah" initiative and the "Utah Property Protection Act" initiative.