



NEWS:

Three Controversial Gun Bills Introduced

APRIL 15, 2019 -- The introduction of three controversial gun control bills in the Senate last week sparked demonstrations at the capitol by supporters and opponents of the measures.

The bills seek to ban dozens of specific semi-automatic rifles, shotguns and pistols (and other weapons exhibiting certain attributes); limit firearm magazine ammunition capacities to no more than 15 rounds; and mandate that Delawareans obtain a state permit to purchase firearms.

Versions of the first two bills have been previously introduced in the General Assembly, but failed to win approval.

The "permit to purchase" proposal (Senate Bill 69) is a first for the Delaware legislature. Currently, 10 states have permit to purchase requirements, including neighboring New Jersey and Maryland.

Word of the bills' introduction leaked out, giving citizens on both sides of the gun control debate an opportunity to organize and express their opinions. In one instance on Wednesday, an estimated 300 people opposing the legislation verbally clashed with the bills' prime sponsors and several dozen members of "Moms Demand Action" at a press event on the east side of Legislative Hall.

The following is a summary of the three bills, which are all pending action in the Senate Executive Committee:

Senate Bill 68 seeks to ban the possession, purchase, manufacture, or sale of more than five dozen semi-automatic rifles, pistols, and shotguns identified by make and model. It would also ban so-called "copycat weapons" -- semi-automatic weapons that have certain qualifying attributes, such as a folding stock, a flare launcher, a flash suppressor, "a pistol grip that protrudes conspicuously beneath the action of the weapon," etc. People currently owning the banned weapons would be allowed to retain them, but they would be restricted in how the weapons could be stored and transported.

Senate Bill 69 would mandate that Delawareans obtain a state-issued permit in order to purchase a firearm. To obtain a card, an individual would have to engage in a live fire exercise (100-round minimum); and complete coursework on suicide prevention; avoiding criminal attack; and engaging in conflict resolution. The individual would also need to submit his or her fingerprints and be subject to a criminal background check. Those obtaining a permit to buy a handgun would have 90-days to make their purchase. The permit could only be used to obtain a single handgun and would have to be turned over to the facilitator of the sale at the time of purchase. A permit to purchase a long gun would be valid for three years from the date of issuance and could be used to buy an unlimited number of rifles or shotguns. The Department of Safety and Homeland Security would maintain a database of all firearms' transactions that would be available to law enforcement agencies and the court system. The bill includes an exclusion for the holders of concealed carry permits, but there are still unanswered questions regarding this provision.

Senate Bill 70 would ban the possession, purchase, sale, and manufacture, of any magazine that can hold more than 15 rounds of ammunition. Under the bill, all Delawareans owning firearms' magazines exceeding this threshold would need to relinquish them by June 30, 2020. The Department of Safety and Homeland Security would be charged with implementing a program providing citizens with \$10 in compensation for each non-conforming magazine surrendered to state authorities. Possession of a large-capacity magazine would be a class B misdemeanor for a first offense and a class E felony for any subsequent offense.

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