
BENEFITS OF HANDGUN PURCHASER LICENSING

BACKGROUND

In 2010, firearms were associated with more than 31,000 deaths, 73,000 non-fatal injuries,¹ and more than 300,000 violent crimes in the U.S.² Most of the firearms used in these events were handguns. Yet many Americans mistakenly believe that handguns are more closely regulated than they actually are. In fact, only a handful of U.S. states require buyers to obtain a license from law enforcement prior to purchasing a handgun. Handgun purchaser licensing laws, especially those which require buyers to provide fingerprints to law enforcement officials, help prevent straw purchasers (persons who are not prohibited from possessing guns who buy guns for prohibited individuals) from illegally diverting guns to criminals.

RESEARCH ON HANDGUN PURCHASER LICENSING

Research has demonstrated that handgun purchaser licensing laws make it much harder for high risk persons to acquire guns and reduce illegal gun trafficking.

- The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) conducted a study which underscored the need for fingerprint-verified handgun purchaser licensing to confirm the buyer's identity. GAO researchers sent individuals into gun stores in 5 states without handgun purchaser licensing laws to purchase firearms using fake IDs. None of the purchases with fake IDs were prevented.³
- Cities located in states with handgun purchaser licensing have much lower rates of within-state illegal gun trafficking than those without licensing.⁴
- States with handgun purchaser licensing laws were also much less likely to *export* crime guns to other states (45% to 76% lower crime gun export rates).^{5, 6}
- After Missouri repealed its handgun purchaser licensing law in August 2007, which had required permits for handguns purchased from private individuals as well as from licensed gun dealers, the share of crime guns recovered by the police with an unusually short time interval from retail sale to crime – which is indicative of trafficking – more than doubled.³ Preliminary research also suggests that, after its license law repeal, Missouri's age-adjusted homicide rate *increased* by 25% at a time when national and regional homicide rates were actually declining.
- Crime guns recovered by police in states with handgun licensing and registration laws (which Maryland currently has a form of) were much less likely to have been originally purchased within the state – indicating that these laws make it harder for criminals to get guns.⁷
- Handgun purchaser licensing laws do not interfere with the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding gun owners. The Supreme Court has specifically said that “laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms” – but which don't ban all handguns – are presumptively valid under the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.⁸

CONCLUSION

Research suggests that, once implemented, Maryland's handgun purchaser licensing law will reduce gun trafficking, gun crime, and gun homicides, and can serve as a national model for other states.

REFERENCES

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