

# Some say Georgia's gun bill is too lax

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Georgia Rep. Sam Teasley, R-Marietta, looks over the Georgia State Capitol during a dinner break on the last day of the legislative session where gun control was discussed, Thursday, March 20, 2014, in Atlanta. Photo: AP Photo/Jason Getz

The proposed law's official name is the Safe Carry Protection Act.

Its opponents call it the “guns everywhere bill.”

Just awaiting the Georgia governor's signature, the legislation would allow guns in bars, churches, airports and schools. It has drawn national attention because of where it would allow guns.

The National Rifle Association, the national pro-gun group, called the bill's passage a “historic victory for the Second Amendment” of the U.S. Constitution, which protects the right to own and carry guns. Americans for Responsible Solutions, founded by Gabrielle Giffords, the former Arizona congresswoman wounded in a 2011 shooting, called it the most extreme gun bill in the nation.

## **Pro-Gun Groups Approve**

The bill comes as a number of states have responded to high-profile shootings by loosening up on laws that restricted the right to carry guns.

But perhaps none has gone as far as Georgia, at least in a single bill.

The legislation would allow licensed gun owners to take weapons into churches, synagogues and mosques, if its leaders allow it. Likewise, people can take guns into bars unless the owner objects, into airports up to security screening areas, and into government buildings. Guns cannot be taken past security checkpoints, however.

The bill would also let schools give guns to staff members and lower the age to obtain a gun license for members of the military from 21 to 18. Another provision of the bill would forbid authorities from taking away firearms during an emergency. This is a response to New Orleans authorities confiscating guns after Hurricane Katrina. The law also would offer defendants an “absolute defense” if a gun is used in the course of a violent attack. If proven that a person used a gun against an attacker, the case against him or her would be dropped.

“You’re not going to stop crime by disarming good people,” said Jerry Henry. He is the executive director of GeorgiaCarry.org, a group that pushed for the bill’s passage. Pro-gun groups say that “good” people need to carry guns. They say this stops “bad” people from committing crimes.

The legislation has drawn national attention, Henry said, because gun control groups believe that “if they can beat us down here, they can stop other states” from expanding gun rights.

## **Church Leaders Disagree**

Gov. Nathan Deal hasn’t indicated whether he will sign the bill. But many think the Republican governor, who has an A rating from the NRA and is up for re-election, will sign it. The bill is popular in Georgia. The legislation would go into effect July 1.

The bill was also supported by Deal's Democratic opponent, state Sen. Jason Carter, former President Jimmy Carter’s grandson.

Opponents say they are worried about armed citizens attending city council meetings, which can become emotional.

Georgia's church leaders disagree about the bill.

Francis J. Mulcahy, the executive director of the Georgia Catholic Conference, expressed concern that more people would be shot if people are allowed to carry around guns. Don Plummer, a spokesman for the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, said that allowing guns in churches is “dangerous.”

Georgia’s Episcopal bishops don't agree with the argument that “good guys” need to carry guns to stop “bad guys.”

“People who had no criminal record and had a legal right to their weapons have (carried out) almost all of the recent tragic shootings in houses of worship and schools,” the bishops said in a statement. “They were ‘good guys’ until they weren’t,” said Bishops Rob Wright and Scott Benhas.

But Mike Griffin, who is with the Georgia Baptist Convention, supports the legislation. He said that churches should set the rules for themselves.

“Georgia Baptists are not saying that they’re for or against weapons being in churches,” he said. “What they’re saying is churches should have the right to determine if they choose to have weapons.”

## **January Gallup Poll Cited**

Gun rights groups point out that a number of the provisions of the Georgia legislation are already in effect in other states.

Chris W. Cox is with the NRA. He said the bill would make Georgia the 27th state to allow licensed gun owners to bring weapons into bars.

The legislation comes as a Gallup poll in January found increased support for easing gun restrictions. The poll found that 16 percent supported making making guns more available, up from 5 percent a year earlier. Last year’s survey was conducted shortly after the Newtown, Conn., school shooting. Support for stricter gun laws dropped to 31 percent from 38 percent a year earlier.

Adam Winkler is a University of California, Los Angeles law professor who has written extensively about the politics surrounding guns. He said the Georgia legislation “shows how strong the NRA is in some parts of the country. They’ve defeated so many gun laws that ending bans on guns in bars and churches is all that’s left.”

Emory University political scientist Alan Abramowitz noted that promoting gun rights is a way for conservative Republican politicians to make their voters happy. Many conservative Republicans don't like laws the restrict guns.

“In Georgia, we’ve got these big Republican majorities in the state House and Senate and a Republican governor,” Abramowitz said. “That puts pressure on the legislators and the governor to reward (people who vote for them). ... You don’t have the excuse that ‘We can’t get everything we want because the Democrats control the White House or the Senate’ like you have in Washington.”

## Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the introduction [paragraphs 1-4] that contains the article's main idea.
- 2 Read the following summary of the article.

*A controversial gun bill in Georgia may drastically change where guns would be allowed in the state.*

Adding which of the following details from the article would MOST strengthen this summary?

- (A) Congresswoman Gabrielle Gifford's Americans for Responsible Solutions opposes the bill.
  - (B) The bill has many supporter and opponents and has received national media attention.
  - (C) The NRA is ecstatic about the possible extension of gun rights, calling it a "victory for the Second Amendment."
  - (D) A professor at Emory University says that supporting guns is good politics for those who want Republican support.
- 3 Read the sentence from the article.

*"You're not going to stop crime by disarming good people," said Jerry Henry.*

Which answer choice explains Henry's point of view?

- (A) Crime rates would decrease if more people carried guns.
- (B) Arming good people makes the world safer for criminals.
- (C) People need guns because police are not able to protect them.
- (D) There will continue to be crime in the world because of guns.

4 Which sentence BEST explains the perspective of church leaders discussed in the section "Church Leaders Disagree"?

- (A) There are "good guys" and "bad guys" in the world, which makes gun control very important.
- (B) Recent shootings have been committed by people who have obtained guns legally.
- (C) Easy access to guns and the ability to carry them in more places does not make the public safer.
- (D) Having the right to carry guns into church buildings puts congregations and clergy at risk.