

GUN LAWS

[LWVUS Position: Adopted 1990 Convention, amended 1994 and 1998]

Protect the health and safety of citizens through limiting the accessibility and regulating the ownership of handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons.

Background and Action:

In 2004, a bill requiring the reporting of a theft or loss of a firearm and another bill concerning a waiting period for the sale of rifles and shotguns were both introduced. The LWVCT, in coalition with CAGV (Connecticut Against Gun Violence), supported both bills. The latter bill died in the Public Safety Committee. The bill requiring reporting of stolen guns passed two committees but remained stalled in the House. It died for lack of action.

The LWVCT also responded to several LWVUS Calls to Action regarding bills to renew the federal assault weapons ban.

In 2005, the stolen firearm bill was re-introduced and a new bill proposed expanding the registration coverage for long guns. Both bills passed the Judiciary Committee but, once again, became stalled in the Public Safety Committee despite active lobbying by the LWVCT and the Coalition.

In the 2006 session, the stolen firearm bill was re-introduced with active lobbying in support by LWVCT and the Coalition. It passed the Senate but failed to pass the House by 7 votes. In 2007, a hard-won victory was achieved when the bill passed and was signed into law by the Governor, after intense lobbying by Connecticut Against Gun Violence, the LWVCT and others.

In 2008 and 2009, the LWVCT supported bills that would require the microstamping of semiautomatic pistols that would make it possible to link a gun to a crime. In both years, the bill died in the Judiciary Committee. However, a bill passed and was signed by the Governor that prohibited the transfer of an assault weapon or machine gun to a person under eighteen years of age. This bill was introduced as a result of an 8-year-old boy dying from the recoil of an assault weapon, which he was using under the supervision of adults.

During the 2010 regular legislative session, we supported a bill that would have mandated annual firearms safety refreshers and required notification to the Department of Public Safety of a firearms purchase within 24 hours. Although the bill was voted out of the Public Safety Committee, it was never taken up in the Judiciary Committee, and died.

In 2011, the LWVCT supported SB 1094 AA *Banning Large Capacity Ammunition Magazines*, which would have prohibited the possession of certain ammunition feeding devices that accept more than ten rounds, and opposed SB 1210, which would have created a presumption of reasonable self-defense in the use of deadly force against a person unlawfully entering a dwelling. Both bills died in the Judiciary Committee.

During the 2012 session, the League supported SB 64, which would have revised an existing statute prohibiting the carrying of a loaded firearm or hunting while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, to make the blood alcohol level for determining intoxication the same as for driving a car, and certain other administrative changes. Although the bill passed the Senate and was placed on the consent calendar, it was never called for a vote in the House. LWVCT opposed HR 5245, which would have barred the authorities issuing temporary permits to carry handguns from modifying or supplementing a uniform Dept. of Emergency Services and Public Protection form for applicants, arguably undercutting the CT discretionary “may issue” standard. Although the bill passed the House, it died on the Senate calendar.

Beginning in the days immediately following December 14, 2012 horrific gun violence in Newtown CT, LWVCT expanded its outreach and advocacy on gun violence prevention, both in Hartford and in our local communities. The League became part of the groundswell response across the state to this tragedy. While researching what legislative agenda could be undertaken consistent with the scope of the LWVUS gun laws position, LWVCT urged members to contact legislative representatives and demand action to improve public safety.

In short order, Governor Malloy appointed a Sandy Hook Advisory Commission to address key policy areas in gun violence prevention; and the General Assembly leadership formed the Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Children’s Safety. Each of the Bipartisan Task Force working subgroups — on Gun Violence Prevention, on Mental Health and on School Safety — held one or more public hearings beginning in late January.

After research and with input from the LWVUS advocacy team, LWVCT submitted testimony on January 28, 2013 to the Working Group on Gun Violence Prevention, and urged our members to speak out for gun violence prevention measures in these four areas: universal background checks for firearms purchases; limitation on large capacity ammunition magazines; strengthening of the assault weapons ban, and strengthening of existing laws on the safe storage of firearms.

LWVCT supported two additional legislative proposals — requiring permits for rifles and shotguns and requiring firearms registration — after reaching out to local leagues to confirm member understanding and agreement.

Local league members became an integral part of the advocacy agenda. As LWVCT intensified advocacy and education efforts at the community and legislative levels, local leagues and committed individual members contacted legislators, sponsored letter writing campaigns and letters to the editor, attended public hearings and other gatherings at the Capitol and wrote their own testimony for the Bipartisan Task Force. LWVCT and local leagues urged members to attend the February 14 March for Change at the Capitol, which attracted 5,500 supporters.

Many additional gun violence prevention bills were introduced during the legislative session, and LWVCT submitted testimony supporting several bills which received a public hearing on March 14. Reportedly impatient with the pace of progress on a comprehensive gun bill, Gov. Malloy introduced his own set of proposals on February 22.

On March 5, the Bipartisan Task Force issued Working Group Recommendations—separate consensus proposals on gun violence prevention for the Democrats and the Republicans and joint recommendations on the mental health and school security proposals. The leadership produced a Bipartisan Bill on April 1-- SB 1160 *AAC Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety*. After vigorous debate, it was passed and signed into law by Gov. Malloy on April 4 as PA 13-3.

The League strongly supported those provisions of the new law which are consistent with the Gun Laws position, including extension of background checks to the private sale of long guns (rifles and shotguns); a new long gun eligibility certificate requirement to buy or receive a long gun (unless already have a handgun permit, handgun eligibility certificate or dealer permit); expansion of the Assault Weapons Ban to add more than 100 specified guns to the list of banned assault weapons, as well as a ban on LWVCT Impact on Issues 2013-2015 – page 69 semiautomatic pistols or rifles that can accept a detachable magazine and have at least one of listed military-style features; minimum age of 18 for purchase of a long gun; increase in penalties for firearms trafficking; ban on Large Capacity Ammunition Magazines that can hold more than 10 rounds; and strengthening of firearm safe storage requirements.

Additional provisions of the law, not covered by the LWVUS Gun Laws position, and on which LWVCT remained silent, included restrictions on ammunition sales to any buyer not already possessing a permit or eligibility certificate; creation of a gun offender registry; a ban on armor-piercing bullets; and six month disqualification for gun permit or eligibility certificate for anyone voluntarily admitted to a psychiatric hospital, other than solely due to alcohol or drug treatment, and extension of disqualification for involuntary confinement to a psychiatric hospital to 5 years.

The extraordinary legislative effort which produced the bipartisan 2013 reforms was followed by quieter legislative attention to gun laws. In 2014, the issue of “amnesty” for gun owners who failed to register firearms in accordance with new requirements was raised, and LWVCT monitored bills and the budget implementer for surprise amendments; but the question was handled administratively.

In 2015, domestic violence prevention coalesced with gun laws in the introduction of bills to expand protection for victims of domestic violence by temporarily removing firearms from persons subject to restraining orders. Law enforcement generally recognizes that a woman is most at risk of death or injury when first attempting to leave an abusive relationship.

LWVCT supported SB 650 *AAC Temporary Restraining Orders*, which would have required the temporary removal of firearms from the home immediately after the issuance of a restraining order involving violence or the threat of violence, pending a hearing within 14 days. The Senate ran out of time to schedule a debate on the bill; and a similar House bill died on the House Calendar.

In 2016, temporary restraining order legislation language was revised. The League presented testimony in support of the new bill and urged LWV members to contact their representatives. HB 5054 made it through the Judiciary and Public Safety committees and was voted on in the 11th hour of the session.

In 2017 LWVCT presented testimony in support of legislation to require The Presentation of a Carry Permit and testimony to reject legislation that would allow Permit to Carry a Firearm Reciprocity, that would allow holders of other states' permits to conceal carry in Connecticut and a bill to Repeal Gun Control Legislation enacted in 2013. All bills died in committee.

LWVCT Participation in National Advocacy

During 2011 and 2012, LWVCT opposed the proposed National Right-to-Carry Reciprocity Act, which would have allowed any person with a valid state-issued concealed firearm permit to carry a concealed firearm in CT, without meeting CT's stringent requirements, thereby conflicting with and undermining CT permit and licensing gun laws. The legislation did not pass.

On the federal level in 2013, LWVCT obtained LWVUS permission to lobby our Congressional delegation in support of background checks, an assault weapons ban, limiting large capacity ammunition clips, and measures to combat gun trafficking through penalties on "straw purchases" of firearms that put guns into the hands of criminals. None of these had passed in Congress as of this writing.

In 2017 LWVCT issued an action alert asking members to contact their local chief of police to ask them to sign on to a national letter urging the Senate not to pass legislation allowing for Federal Right to Carry Reciprocity.