



The League of Women Voters of Delaware Urges Release of SB 163 Regarding Banning Assault Weapons

presented at a hearing of the Senate Judicial Committee on June 6, 2018

The League of Women Voters of Delaware urges the Committee to release SB 163 and seek speedy enactment.

Although our statement relates primarily to the issue of the age of people who can buy assault-style weapons, the history relates as well to why assault weapons have not been treated proportionately to their current danger. Our statement quotes an article from the Huffington Post entitled *Why Most Americans Can Buy AR-15s Before They Can Have Their First Beer*.¹

“Under federal law, and in almost every state, the minimum age for purchasing a long gun from a licensed dealer is 18. This category of firearms encompasses shotguns and rifles, including the assault-style weapons that have become popular in mass shootings. Federal law provides no minimum age for the possession of long guns, and in some states, it’s legal for children younger than 18 to own these weapons as long as they have parental consent.

“This system gives millions of young Americans the right to buy the deadliest civilian weaponry three years before they can legally drink alcohol. It dates back to the Gun Control Act of 1968. Although civilian firepower has changed dramatically over the past half-century, these distinctions have not.

“‘Back in the day, you had a lower gun age for rifles because they were often used for hunting,’ said Adam Winkler, a professor of constitutional law at the UCLA School of Law. ‘Young men would have valid reasons for hunting, and they could even have it for self-defense, but it was primarily for recreation.’

“Back then, many popular civilian rifles were bolt-action, or lever-action. They typically featured lower-capacity magazines, and required the shooter to manually chamber each round, firing more slowly than modern semi-automatic weapons like the AR-15, the now-popular civilian rifle platform modeled off military-issue weapons of the past and present.

“In this technological landscape, lawmakers in the 1960s regarded handguns as a much bigger threat in the hands of young people, who can tend to be more erratic and prone to violence.

“‘This all stems from the idea that handguns were usually weapons of self-defense and criminal misuse, and neither of those two things were seemingly appropriate for most kids.’ said Winkler. ‘So, the idea was that because handguns were thought to be more dangerous than long guns, that they had stricter rules.’

“Handguns are still used in the majority of gun violence today. Handguns were involved in about 65 percent of the 11,000 gun homicides recorded by the FBI in 2016. Rifles were used in just 374 of those slayings, though the murder weapon wasn’t specified in 3,077 cases, likely due to inconsistent reporting by law enforcement agencies.

“Although shootings involving military-style rifles may be aberrations in the steady stream of daily U.S. gun violence, it’s becoming increasingly clear that they can inflict mass casualties in the wrong hands. Yet state and federal regulations on the purchase of handguns often don’t extend to long guns. For example, gun stores must report to law enforcement any sale of multiple handguns to a single buyer over a five-day period. This requirement doesn’t exist for long guns. Many states also have waiting periods for handgun purchases, which don’t extend to long guns. And state open-carry laws regarding the public display of firearms tend to be far more permissive toward long guns than handguns.”

It's time we deal with the technology that has brought us military style weapons that have led to mass murder in too many cases. We urge release of SB 163 so that legislators can take a stand.

¹ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/ar-15-purchase-age_us_5a8606fee4b00bc49f424c9e