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Gun rights boom in Alaska

Concealed carry is OK statewide, city permits not

Matt Volz

Associated Press

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JUNEAU, Alaska - Starting Wednesday, a new anti-gun-control law in Alaska will allow the carrying of concealed weapons without a permit, even in the seven Alaska cities where permits are now required.

Keeping a firearm in a vehicle, even if it is parked on property where the owner has a no-gun policy, will be allowed.

And, some police chiefs say, local ordinances that ban guns from public buildings will no longer be enforceable.

Alaska's new law forbids municipalities from passing gun laws that are more restrictive than state law.

The National Rifle Association, which helped Republican state Rep. Mike Chenault draft the new law, said it wants to prevent cities from passing restricting laws in the future. Alaska will be the 44th state to have such a law against state pre-emption on its books.

"We are looking to make it uniform to all 50 states," spokeswoman Kelly Hobbs said from the NRA's Fairfax, Va., headquarters. "Without it, it creates an unfair, inconsistent and confusing patchwork of local firearms ordinances."

Chenault said a law-abiding citizen should be able to carry a firearm wherever he wants to, but in Alaska, that citizen may be breaking the law and not even know it.

"You could leave Homer (a city) with a gun in your vehicle and find yourself in conflict with laws in other municipalities just by driving through those municipalities," he said.

The part of the law that most concerns some police chiefs is the lifting of bans on guns in public buildings. That could leave workers vulnerable to attack, Anchorage Police Chief Walter Monegan said.

"There are lots of people, myself included, we really value our constitutional rights," Monegan said. "But if we had the same enthusiasm to also support our constitutional responsibilities, then I would be less concerned."

Across the state in Bethel, Police Chief Ben Dudley said he also is concerned that he will no longer have the option of charging people with entering a municipal building with a weapon. But he's more philosophical on the effects of that city law when it comes to stopping somebody who means to do harm.

"If there were people with bad intentions entering into municipal buildings, the law isn't going to stop those people anyway," Dudley said. "They're going to stick a

pistol down their pants anyway."

The new law would allow cities to keep guns out of places beyond a restricted access point, such as a metal detector, but the chiefs say their cities can't afford to staff and equip such points.

Plus, "It runs counter to the intent of public buildings to establish the checkpoints," Juneau Police Chief Richard Gummow said.

Chenault said his interpretation of the new law differs. State law now does not specifically prohibit weapons in municipal buildings, but it does in state buildings. If municipalities pass their own weapons bans for public buildings, those laws shouldn't be considered any more restrictive than the state's ban, he said.

But he acknowledged that it may take a court case to see if his interpretation is correct.

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