

Ohio expands gun rights with new laws on self-defense immunity and firearms tracking

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COLUMBUS, Ohio—Two recently passed Ohio laws take preemptive action to help gun owners, from expanding legal immunity for using concealed handguns at houses of worship to prohibiting firearm ownership fees and barring public- and private-sector tracking of firearms owners.

House Bill 452 and Senate Bill 58, signed by Gov. Mike DeWine last week without comment, are the latest steps by Ohio Republican lawmakers in their years-long effort to bolster gun rights in Ohio and [loosen state gun-control measures](#).

In 2019, DeWine proposed sweeping regulations meant to combat gun violence after a mass shooting in a Dayton nightlife district. But the Republican-controlled Ohio General Assembly largely rejected those changes. In the years since, state lawmakers have loosened regulations -- including allowing open carry in Ohio -- that DeWine has signed into law.

Here's more on the recently adopted measures, which each take effect in March.

Self-defense immunity at faith events

HB452, which passed the legislature with bipartisan support, includes a largely non-controversial measure to grant legal immunity to people who kill, injure or damage property with a concealed handgun in self-defense or to protect people while at a house of worship or on other property owned by a nonprofit.

Ohio law already extends such legal protection at private companies, universities, and local governments. The new law extends that protection to people who defend others from those who threaten violence at houses of worship, preschools, summer camps, community centers, nursing homes, and college student groups.

That's according to Howie Beigelman, president and CEO of Ohio Jewish Communities, during legislative testimony last year in favor of the proposal, when

it [was originally introduced as Senate Bill 32](#). A couple gun-rights groups, as well as a representative of a Warren County church, [also testified in favor of the idea](#).

State Sen. Tim Schaffer, a Fairfield County Republican, said he introduced the proposal at the request of a constituent whose church has a defensive protection plan that involves members carrying concealed handguns.

“This bill does not expand concealed carry rights or locations,” Schaffer said [in written testimony last year](#). “But it will go a long way to protect the innocent organizations and their members who have no ill intent and are trying to do the right thing in a difficult moment.”

Forbid requirements for gun insurance, fees

SB58 prohibits any government body in Ohio from requiring residents to pay a fee to own a firearm or a knife, or to obtain liability insurance in order to own a firearm.

The sponsors of the bill, Republican state Sens. Terry Johnson of Scioto County and Theresa Gavarone of Wood County, testified last year that they introduced the legislation after the city council in San Jose, California, voted to require local gun owners to pay a \$25-per-year “gun harm reduction fee” and get liability insurance to cover damages from accidental discharges.

New Jersey [passed a similar measure in 2022](#) that also mandates gun liability insurance and [raised gun licensing fees from \\$2 to \\$200](#).

“We want to ensure that such infringements on the Second Amendment do not happen here in Ohio,” Johnson and Gavarone said [in written legislative committee testimony](#).

Local-government groups opposed the bill, arguing it was another example of GOP lawmakers [eroding municipalities’ home-rule authority](#) under the Ohio Constitution. Other critics [argued](#) the measure addresses a problem that doesn’t exist in Ohio and [that liability insurance is needed](#) to ensure that victims of gun violence can have their medical bills paid.

The Ohio House and Senate, each of which are dominated by Republicans, passed SB58 on largely party-line votes last year.

Firearms registry bans

Another part of SB58 prohibits financial institutions from tracking firearms purchases and blocks state and local government officials in Ohio from keeping a registry of firearms owners.

Johnson, who introduced the proposal in separate legislation before it was folded into SB58, said in testimony that politicians and activists have pressured credit-card companies to start tracking firearms ownership by using a merchant code created in 2022 specifically for purchases from firearms retailers.

The bill prohibits credit-card companies and other financial institutions from requiring the use of the firearms merchant code, declining sales based on the use of that code, or disclosing financial records.

Gun-control advocates [argue](#) the merchant code can be used by credit-card companies and law enforcement to identify and flag suspicious purchases of guns, just as they do in cases of suspected fraud or money laundering.

But Johnson said in written sponsor testimony that allowing companies to track and block purchases of firearms would violate their customers' privacy and threaten their Second Amendment rights. Several other states have already passed similar measures, including Texas, Florida, North Dakota, West Virginia, Idaho, Mississippi and Montana.