



THE INTELL

Guest Opinion

Legislature moving on two bills that favor gun lobby

By PEGGY WALSH
May 7, 2017

Pennsylvania parents and taxpayers should be alarmed that the Pennsylvania Legislature is taking up two bills that will bring guns into schools and pave the way for lawsuits against local governments, thus increasing the threat of gun violence in our communities.

The "Sue the Cities Bill" (HB 671) makes it impossible for local governments to pass common-sense gun safety legislation that Harrisburg refuses to consider. In 2015 under the original pre-emption law, the NRA sued Lancaster for requiring the reporting of lost or stolen guns.

Philadelphia was sued for seven ordinances, including ones that require owners to report lost or stolen firearms, prohibit guns from city-owned facilities and ban weapons possession by people subject to protection-from-abuse orders.

More than 20 Pennsylvania municipalities repealed gun safety ordinances rather than face expensive lawsuits. This number includes Bucks County, which repealed its laws banning the carrying of guns in county-owned parks. The most insane features of this bill are that the litigant does not have to be a gun owner or live in the county or city being sued. Republicans constantly tout local control yet deny it to local governments in their own state.

The supreme irony of the next bill (Senate bill 383) is that it grants local control to school boards to permit school personnel to carry firearms under the slick marketing that this will somehow add safety to our schools ... oh, and sell more guns. Strange that our legislators are falling all over themselves to grant local control in regard to who can carry guns into school while they regulate many other facets of public education. The bill does not stipulate what kind of training these individuals must have, nor discuss the safe storage of the guns that are brought onto school grounds.

As a former teacher, I cannot imagine how I could carry a firearm in a classroom. In a holster? Lock it in a filing cabinet? In my purse? As a parent, I know I would not want my children in a school where anyone might be carrying a concealed weapon.

I track state and national gun legislation for the Bucks County Women's Advocacy Coalition. We view sensible gun safety legislation to be a vital aspect of our mission to improve the lives and protect the safety of women and their families in Pennsylvania. Over the past three years, we have written to, called and visited our Bucks County legislators to advocate for the passage of sensible gun safety legislation, such as closing the long gun loophole; mandatory surrender of firearms to the sheriff within 24 hours by domestic abusers with a protection from abuse ordered by a judge; reporting lost and stolen guns; and mandatory safe storage of firearms. None of these bills has moved out of committees. Yet, both houses have moved with remarkable haste on two bills that the gun lobby supports.

Instead of considering sane legislation, our elected officials keep choosing to put our children in danger and make it impossible for our local governments to do what the state has refused to do. As a group that works in a nonpartisan fashion based on a set of principles to strengthen families and promote public health and safety, we are dismayed that too many Pennsylvania legislators seem to be susceptible to the slick marketing, deep-pocketed, intransigent, unreasonable gun lobby that in fact makes children and families less safe and more at risk.

We thank state Rep. Tina Davis for voting "no" on the "Sue the Cities Bill," and we are severely disappointed that our own Sen. Robert Tomlinson voted in committee to allow guns in our schools. We urge more of our legislators to resist the powerful gun lobby in our state and vote against HB 671 and SB 383.

Concerned parents and citizens need to understand that the gun lobby is on the move and is making a concerted marketing effort to ensure that no responsible safety restrictions whatsoever are placed on those who choose to own firearms. Unfortunately, if these bills pass, our legislators will have sided with the gun lobby against Pennsylvania municipalities and our children.

Peggy Walsh, Morrisville, is a retired teacher and an issue specialist for the Bucks County Women's Advocacy Coalition.