



HD.4420 - An Act modernizing firearm laws

HD.4420 is a comprehensive bill that touches on a wide variety of issues pertaining to preventing gun violence. Gun violence is a public health crisis both here in Massachusetts and the United States at large. Passing a strong gun safety bill is critical – we must address the urgency of the issue with bold and comprehensive policy responses.

Gun safety policies have strong public support in the Commonwealth:

A [2022 poll](#) of 1,000 Massachusetts respondents by UMass Amherst found broad support – including from firearm owners, who made up 20% of respondents – for gun safety policies including background checks on all gun sales and regulations on assault weapons.¹ 63% of respondents opposed making it easier for gun owners to obtain a concealed carry permit, while only 20% of overall respondents and only 33% of respondents who were firearm owners expressed any kind of support.

Firearm dealer inspections

Currently local police departments are responsible for regularly inspecting firearm dealers, and in fact, are *required* to perform inspections once per year. However, a [recent Boston Globe investigation](#) found that more than half the departments they surveyed hadn't conducted a single inspection of a gun dealer since 2017.² Many of these departments lack the capacity to conduct such inspections regularly.

What HD.4420 does:

- Directs the Massachusetts State Police to conduct inspections of gun dealers, instead of the local licensing authority, to facilitate standardization of inspections and ensure inspections occur, and strengthens dealer licensing and training standards for dealers.

¹ Sharpe, Jared. "Broad Majorities, Including Firearm Owners, Support Gun Control Measures in Mass., According to New UMass Amherst / WCVB Poll : UMass Amherst," June 28, 2022.

<https://www.umass.edu/news/article/broad-majorities-including-firearm-owners-support-gun-control-measures-mass-according>.

² Ryley, Sarah L. "Paper Tiger: Massachusetts Has a Reputation for Tough Gun Laws, but Enforcement Is Another Story - The Boston Globe." BostonGlobe.Com, December 10, 2022.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/12/10/metro/paper-tiger-massachusetts-has-reputation-tough-gun-laws-enforcement-is-another-story/>.

Assault Weapons, other semi-automatic long guns, and machine gun conversion devices

Massachusetts is one of ten states that has a law to prohibit assault weapons, because our lawmakers know that military-style firearms have no place in our communities. Assault weapons fire high velocity rounds that cause devastating damage to the human body. They are also easier to conceal than most traditional rifles and shotguns while holding more ammunition and being easier to reload. This bill will help keep these weapons out of our Commonwealth and take additional steps to limit the spread of these especially deadly weapons here.

What HD.4420 does:

- Strengthens Massachusetts' assault weapons prohibition by expanding it to cover more firearms and facilitates the enforcement of the prohibition.
- Raises the age for possession of a semi-automatic long gun (rifle or shotgun) to 21.
- Prohibits all machine gun conversion devices or devices that increase rate of fire of firearms.

Community-based violence prevention

Massachusetts has long been a national leader in funding community-based solutions that take a public health approach to reducing gun violence, including community violence intervention programs, youth jobs funding, reentry programs for formerly incarcerated people, and more. These programs can make a huge difference – for example, after the start of the program in 2012, clients enrolled in the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) had 36% fewer arrests for violent offenses, including 50% fewer arrests for weapon related offenses and 20% fewer arrests for non-violent offenses than did young men identified for the program who never enrolled.³ Along with strengthening our policies, sustained and meaningful investment in these community based programs is essential to preventing violence.

What HD.4420 does:

- Creates a special legislative commission to examine the funding structure for community-based violence prevention services in the Commonwealth, ensuring that it is both impactful and equitable

Crime gun data analysis

A critical part of preventing gun violence is understanding the source of guns used to commit crimes. According to a recent [ATF report](#), there were 9,322 crime guns recovered within MA and traced to a known purchaser between 1/1/2017 and 12/31/2021.⁴

What HD.4420 does:

- Directs the Department of Criminal Justice Services (CJIS) to collect and analyze a wider range of data on firearms and firearm crimes, and regularly make that data available to the public. This bill will help us learn more about incidents of gun violence in

³ "Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) Legislative Report." Executive Office of Health and Human Services, February 2021. <https://commcorp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/SSYI-Annual-Legislative-Report-FY20.pdf>

⁴ "National Firearms Commerce and Trafficking Assessment (NFCTA): Crime Guns - Volume Two, Massachusetts State Reference Table." Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, January 2023. <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/docs/report/massachusetts-state-report/download>.

the Commonwealth and the origins of the guns used in those crimes. It will also help monitor our permitting laws to ensure they are being equitably applied and enforced.

Ghost guns

A ghost gun is a do-it-yourself, homemade gun frequently made from ready-to-assemble kits. They are unserialized, untraceable, and can be purchased without a background check under Massachusetts law, allowing those who may otherwise be prohibited from purchasing a gun to easily obtain one. Ghost guns are rapidly spreading in Massachusetts, as the 2022 Massachusetts Crime Gun Report lists a 75% increase in seizures of ghost guns in 2022 over 2021.⁵ In April 2022, the Boston Police Department also announced that ghost gun recoveries were up nearly 300% since they started tracking them in 2019.⁶

What HD.4420 does:

- Requires all firearms manufactured, assembled, possessed, purchased, or transferred into Massachusetts to be serialized, so law enforcement can trace them if they are used to commit a crime.

Sensitive places & firearm training

The United States Supreme Court made a dangerous and irresponsible decision in June 2022 in *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen* when it struck down a NY law requiring an individual to prove they had a “proper cause” to carry a firearm in order to obtain a concealed carry permit, impacting our similarly strong concealed carry requirement in Massachusetts and making it easier to carry guns in our communities. While the Commonwealth amended the concealed carry law during the last legislative session to comply with the *Bruen* decision, we need to enact stronger protections for carrying concealed guns in our communities.

What HD.4420 does:

- Prohibits firearms in government buildings, polling places, and educational institutions, including higher education.
- Prohibits firearms on private property without express permission or signage.
- Strengthens the process for issuing Licenses to Carry firearms, ammunition, or feeding devices, including requiring applicants to interview with the licensing authority for initial applications and to complete firearms safety training, including live fire training.

Extreme Risk Protection Orders

Massachusetts’ Extreme Risk law allows law enforcement or family & household members of a person in crisis to petition state courts to intervene and temporarily prevent them from accessing firearms by issuing an Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO). This can help de-escalate emergency situations, and is a proven way to intervene before a person in crisis uses a gun to harm themselves or others.

⁵ Massachusetts State Police, “2022 Crime Gun Report,” July 3, 2023, <https://malegislature.gov/Reports>. Analysis includes privately made firearms (PMFs). A total of 316 PMFs or ghost guns were recovered in 2022.

⁶ Matthew Medsger, “Boston Police: Recovery of ghost guns up nearly 300% since tracking began,” Boston Herald, April 17, 2022, <https://bit.ly/46V8Ci9>.

What the bill does

- Expands list of individuals eligible to file an ERPO to include licensed healthcare providers, school administrators, and employers.

Innovative gun safety technologies

Guns are the leading cause of death for children, teens, and college-aged people in this country, and guns take more than 43,000 lives every year in the U.S.⁷ The gun industry has been resistant to implementing advances in technology such as microstamping, which helps law enforcement solve gun crimes by imprinting an identifying mark on a shell casing after a bullet has been fired, and smart guns, which can use biometric technology to keep guns from being used by unauthorized people if they're lost or stolen, which are both important accountability tools.

What the HD.4420 does:

- Establishes a commission to study and report on the feasibility of microstamping and smart gun technology, with a report due in September in 2024.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. A yearly average was developed using four years of the most recent available data: 2018 to 2021.