

N.C. Senate strengthens gun control laws

Already are some of the toughest in South

"I think it's very important that we recognize that there are people who are a danger to themselves and others."

BY DEVIN ROONEY
STATE AND NATIONAL EDITOR

JUNE 19 — A bill intended to keep those with serious mental illness who are involuntarily committed from purchasing or possessing guns is now under consideration by the N.C. Senate.

The bill is sponsored by N.C. Sen. Tony Rand, D-Cumberland, senate majority leader. It passed a Senate Judiciary Committee by a vote of 7 to 4 on June 12.

Gun control advocacy groups consistently find that North Carolina has the toughest gun control laws of most states in the Southeast.

Rand said he sponsored the bill because it could make the state a safer place.

"I thought that the public deserved the protection that the bill would offer," he said.

N.C. Attorney General Roy Cooper also has been a strong advocate of preventing the involuntarily

committed from owning firearms.

"Stopping those with severe mental illnesses from having guns makes sense, and sharing the information can keep tragedies like Virginia Tech from happening in North Carolina," Cooper stated in a press release issued June 9.

The bill would require that people who are involuntarily committed are entered into a national database used for issuing gun permits.

The change would bring the state in line with a federal provision that prohibits the involuntarily committed from buying or having guns.

Although the legislation would prevent the involuntarily committed from legally buying guns, it also allows people who are no longer deemed dangerous to appeal the gun ban to the courts.

If a judge finds that the person has recovered and a psychiatrist or qualified psychologist agrees, the right to bear arms could be restored.

ELLIE KINNAIRD, N.C. SENATOR, D-ORANGE

Despite North Carolina's reputation for having strict gun laws, the state has fallen behind neighboring states in registering people who are ineligible to buy guns.

Since the registry started in 1998, North Carolina has registered 466 people. Virginia has registered 80,000 people in that time.

Opponents of the bill have said that it is unfair to people who were involuntarily committed but are not dangerous to the public because they would also be put on the registry.

But Rand said that he thinks allowing people who were involuntarily committed to own firearms is especially dangerous because if they commit a violent crime they would have a ready excuse.

"It seems to me that they'd have

a perfect defense, that they were not responsible for their actions."

N.C. Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, D-Orange, said she also felt the legislation was an important step for public safety in the state.

"I think it's very important that we recognize that there are people who are a danger to themselves and others," she said.

Kinnaird said that the legislature tried to pass similar measures in the past but that the first bill was opposed by advocates for the mentally ill.

"The mental health community was not happy with the solutions we came up with. They felt that it was stigmatizing and penalizing."

Contact the State and National editor at stntdesk@unc.edu



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