

Chairperson McEntee, Representative Messier, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am submitting this testimony to respectfully oppose H7754, which would require Rhode Island residents to apply for a concealed carry permit only through the licensing authority in the town or city where they reside or maintain a place of business. I offer my perspective both as a Rhode Island resident and as a citizen who understands the importance of lawful, responsible firearm ownership.

Currently, Rhode Island provides two pathways for lawful concealed carry permits: the Attorney General's office, which operates under a "may issue" standard, and local city or town licensing authorities, which are "shall issue" for applicants who meet statutory requirements. This dual-path system provides essential flexibility and ensures that responsible citizens have access to their constitutional right, even if one licensing authority applies overly subjective standards.

H7754 undermines this flexibility in multiple ways:

Eliminates a critical safety valve for applicants and risks arbitrary denial – By restricting residents to their local authority, applicants have no alternative if a local licensing authority applies their own personal beliefs rather than following the clear statutory requirements. The law is designed to be objective, yet this bill allows local discretion to effectively override state law. All authorities should enforce the law consistently, not substitute personal judgment for legal criteria.

Creates geographic inequality – Rhode Island residents in one town could be denied a permit despite meeting all statutory criteria, while a resident in another town with identical qualifications could be approved. Rights should not depend on zip code or local interpretation.

Locks in subjective discretion – Local authorities retain discretion over "proper reason" and "suitability," yet this bill removes any opportunity for applicants to seek approval elsewhere. Subjective criteria, when applied without alternatives, increase the risk of inconsistent and unfair outcomes.

No demonstrated public safety benefit – Background checks and NICS screenings already provide uniform, objective safeguards. Limiting where residents may apply does not increase public safety; it only restricts lawful access.

Potential constitutional concerns – By restricting access to a fundamental right based on residence and creating arbitrary barriers, the law could be viewed as placing an undue burden on the exercise of the Second Amendment.

Compounding the problem, Rhode Island does not have a clear, codified process for appeal when a permit is denied. The only recourse for applicants is to file a lawsuit, a path that costs time and money most residents cannot afford. For years, proposed appeal bills have been introduced to create a fair appeal process, but these measures have repeatedly failed to pass. This lack of oversight and recourse leaves law-abiding citizens at the mercy of local officials.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose H7754. The current system balances public safety with constitutional rights. H7754 unnecessarily eliminates that balance, creating inequity, arbitrary barriers, and the potential for authorities to substitute personal beliefs for the law.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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