

Minnesota House passes gun control measures

Tim Pugmire · St. Paul · Apr 30, 2019

Politics



Members of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America hold a rally in the Minnesota State Capitol rotunda in St. Paul Monday. *Glen Stubbe | Star Tribune via AP*

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A pair of contentious gun-control provisions won approval late Monday night in the Minnesota House, withstanding Republican-led efforts to remove them from a wide-ranging public safety bill that passed 70-64.

One provision would expand criminal background check requirements for several types of gun transactions. The other allows authorities to temporarily keep guns away from people deemed a risk to themselves or others.

Both measures were the focus of an intense committee hearing earlier in the session. House Democrats included the two gun-control provisions in the omnibus bill rather than put them to a vote as stand-alone bills.

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Rep. Dave Pinto, DFL-St. Paul, the author of the background check measure, said the changes would keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people.

"As policymakers we want to be bold. We want to be innovative. But in fact, there is no way in which these provisions are breaking new ground," he said. "These are in use around the country. Legislatures, governors, Republican, Democratic, they're keeping the residents of those states safer, and Minnesota should take the same step as well."

Democrats won majority control of the Minnesota House last fall with many suburban candidates, as well as voters in their districts, calling for stricter gun laws.

"The bill is designed simply to ensure that people who pose a danger to themselves or others that they are not going to be in possession of guns," said first-term Rep. Ruth Richardson, DFL-Mendota Heights, and author of the extreme risk protection orders provision.

Rep. Eric Lucero, R-Dayton, tried to derail the protection orders by suggesting that other potential weapons should also be confiscated.

"We know that if a person is a threat to themselves or another that a firearm is not the sole mechanism by which one could inflict such harm to themselves or another," he said.

Both provisions infringe on constitutional rights, argued Rep. Jim Nash, R- Waconia. Nash contends that the background check measure would do nothing to stop guns from getting into the hands of criminals.

"These are people who will exchange drugs for stolen guns from other states or stolen cash for guns from other states. They've acquired them illegally to go out and commit crimes," he said. "So, somebody who has chosen to do that already is not going to say 'oh, I should probably get a background check before I commit a crime.'"

The Republican-controlled Senate has not taken up any gun-related bills this session and has no plans to. Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka, R-Nisswa, says he was willing to hold a hearing, but only if the House passed stand-alone bills.

"I don't want to waste more time on that. It's not going to be in our judiciary bills," he said. "The bills are dead."

At a rally before the vote, House Speaker Melissa Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park, thanked gun-control advocates for their work in last year's election. But conceding the uphill fight in the Senate, she said their help is needed again next year.

"You know the forces that oppose these changes in law are strong. They have money behind them, and they will be going after some of our most vulnerable members," she said. "So, it's really important that you're with us today and you're with us on the trail and you're with us to the end."

In addition to the gun measures, the larger House public safety budget bill includes increased funding for the hiring of correctional officers, a ban on private prisons, new guidelines for sexual assault investigations and the establishment of a task force to look at legalizing recreational marijuana.

Correction (April 30, 2019): An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated that a provision would expand background checks to all gun transactions.

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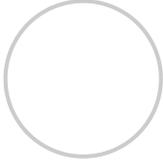
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Tim Pugmire covers politics and state government for MPR News.