

NEWS FROM ASSEMBLY DEMOCRATS

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GREENWALD/McKEON HANDGUN PERMIT DATABASE ADVANCES
Measure Would Help Prevent Mentally Ill From Purchasing Firearms

(TRENTON) -- An Assembly panel today released legislation sponsored by Assemblymen Louis D. Greenwald and John F. McKeon that would establish a confidential database to assist the State Police in issuing firearm purchaser identification cards and handgun purchase permits.

Current law prevents the issuance of such permits to individuals who are, or who have been, confined to a hospital, mental institution, or sanitarium for mental disorders. However, there is no statewide database available to assist the law enforcement community in carrying out this statutory responsibility.

"At a time when we must be ever vigilant in keeping guns out of the wrong hands, we need to give State Police the necessary tools to prevent guns from falling into the wrong hands," said Greenwald (D-Camden).

The measure (A-1543) would require the chief operating officers of hospitals, mental institutions, and sanitariums to periodically submit reports to the State Police Superintendent on the people confined in their facilities for mental disorders which would disqualify them from obtaining permits to buy firearms.

To protect those facilities' officers and employees, the bill would afford them civil and criminal immunity, provided the reports and their information are prepared and submitted in good faith. If the information is misused or false reports are submitted, those officers or employees would be guilty of a fourth degree crime.

"What good are laws if they are unenforceable," said McKeon (D-Essex). "We must act now to begin the process of compiling a list to help the State Police carry out its gun-monitoring duties."

Recognizing that confinement for a mental disorder is not necessarily a permanent disqualification, the legislation specifies the State Police superintendent must inform people denied cards or permits that their applications will be reconsidered if they can prove they no longer suffer from disabilities that

would interfere with their handling of firearms

"This measure ensures public safety while being sensitive to the needs of those who have suffered with mental illness," said Greenwald.

The Assembly Law and Public Safety Committee released the measure 6 to 0. It now goes to the Assembly Speaker, who decides if and when to post it for a floor vote.