

COALITION OF CONNECTICUT SPORTSMEN

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Testimony presented to the JUDICIARY COMMITTEE, MARCH 16, 2009

IN OPPOSITION to S. B. No. 358 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING PROHIBITING THE TRANSFER OF ASSAULT WEAPONS OR MACHINE GUNS TO MINORS.

by Robert T. Crook, Director

This bill is being addressed due to an incident in Massachusetts involving an eight-year-old who shot and killed himself at a "Machine Gun Shoot" using a fully automatic firearm.

Federal law defines a "machinegun" as "any weapon which shoots, is designed to shoot, or can be readily restored to shoot, automatically more than one shot, without manual reloading, by a single function of the trigger." OLR has published three reports on the accident issue, the latter two rightfully address ONLY Machineguns. The question then becomes WHY are so-called "Assault Weapons" which are NOT machineguns being addressed in this bill?

So-called "Assault Weapons," not machine guns - only semi-automatic fire (one shot, one pull of the trigger), under our statutes can be legally owned and used for legal purposes (hunting, target shooting, self-defense) if they have been registered. Why would a restriction be placed on these activities by those under 18 when State law allows minors ages 12 to 16 to obtain a Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) junior firearms hunting license, allowing them to hunt with firearms, including so-called "Assault Weapons" legally registered, under supervision? People over age 16 may get a DEP license for unsupervised firearm hunting (CGS §§ 26-27(a) & 26-38). Section 1 is clearly in conflict with long-standing current statutes.

We suggest deletion of Section 1 of the bill for those reasons.

In Section 2 of the bill which addresses the relevant cause of the MA accident (Machineguns), we would strongly suggest reducing the eighteen-year-old prohibition to sixteen to correspond with: Sec. 52-571g. Strict liability of person who fails to securely store a loaded firearm. Any person whose act or omission constitutes a violation of section 29-37i shall be strictly liable for damages when a minor obtains a firearm, as defined in section 53a-3, and causes the injury or death of such minor or any other person. For the purposes of this section, "minor" means any person under the age of sixteen years. Additionally there is no exemption for a 17 year old who wants to familiarize with machinegun shooting before entering the military, or for National Guard/Reserve/Active members of the military to shoot machineguns.

Standardization is a key to compliance and enforcement. **"It will be of little avail to the people that the laws are made by men of their own choice if the laws be so voluminous that they cannot be read, or so incoherent that they cannot be understood."** —JAMES MADISON.

Thank you.