**Beat: News**

# Md. House passes sweeping gun-control legislation

**Bill back to Senate for final approval**

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**USPA NEWS -** ANNAPOLIS - The Maryland House of Delegates voted 78-to-61 Wednesday evening to pass Governor Martin O'Malley's sweeping gun-control legislation aka "Firearms Safety Act of 2013." Given its likely passage, this legislation will make Maryland one of the toughest gun-control law states in the nation.

In the 11 hours of spirited floor debate that spanned over 2 days, the House made amendments to the Senate version of the bill passed February 28. The bill must now go back to the Senate where differences are expected to be resolved swiftly, and sent to Gov. Martin O'Malley for his signature by Monday.

The proposed legislation requires that gun buyers be fingerprinted and licensed, limits magazine capacity to 10 bullets, and places new limits on weapons purchases by the mentally ill.

The legislation also bans in excess of 40 types of existing assault rifles, including all models of the AR-15. That weapon was used in the Newtown, CT attack, by accused Aurora, Colorado, shooter James Holmes, and by Washington's "Beltway sniper" in 2002.

Immediately after the House vote, Governor Martin O'Malley characterized the 78-to-61 vote as historic, and one that would make Maryland a safer state to live, work, and visit.

"Maryland has stood up as a state to say that this is not acceptable and that military assault weapons have no place in a civil society," O'Malley said. "Our state shouldn´t settle for being in the top 10 most violent states in America, there are a lot of lives that can be saved,“ the Governor said. “The tragedy in Newtown [CT] gave us the inflection point, the ability to forge a consensus that prior to that awful tragedy might not have been possible. Hopefully, we can wrest some good out of that.“

A handful of states have passed more restrictive gun-control laws in the wake of the Newtown, CT massacre in December, but Maryland's imminent new law goes beyond most in requiring that those wishing to purchase a gun provide digital fingerprints, undergo classroom training, target practice, pass a proficiency exam, and a universal background check in order to obtain the necessary license to buy a gun.

Del. Herb McMillan, a Republican representing Annapolis, called the legislation a "placebo." He told his colleagues that he was intrigued by the bill when it was first introduced, but as the process progressed, he regretted that lawmakers spent so much time "talking past each other."

"I think the second amendment has limits. You can't own an M60 machine gun... a tank or a cannon, and I'm fine with that," McMillan said. "(But) I've never seen more pages of a bill that do less to help or protect people. If you think that voting for this is going to decrease crime on the streets, you're kidding yourself."

Del. Michael A. McDermott (R-Worcester) has repeatedly contended that the licensing requirement would add even more delay to purchasing a gun, amounting to a “defacto ban“ on gun sales in Maryland. McDermott, a Sheriff's Deputy on the Eastern Shore believes it to be unconstitutional to require an individual to be fingerprinted in order to exercise a right guaranteed to them under the United States Constitution.

Leaving the State House Wednesday, House Minority Leader Anthony J. O´Donnell (R-Calvert), called the measure a “Mickey Mouse“ gun ban designed only to help Democratic Governor Martin O´Malley “punch his national ticket“ for a 2016 Presidential run.

"I just find it incredible," said O'Donnell during the debate on a floor amendment, "We have a left-wing legislature on a jihad to take away the rights of active-duty military."

Del. Kathleen M. Dumais (D-Montgomery), the Democratic floor leader who shepherded the bill through the Judiciary Committee, and then the full House of Delegates called the fingerprinting and licensing requirement one of the most important parts of the legislation.

“This is not just about responding to tragedies“ Dumais said. “This bill is to address, specifically, what Maryland needs, and the problem Maryland has is with handguns.“

Law Enforcement Officers and State's Attorneys throughout the state have unanimously supported the strict licensing requirements in this bill, saying it will be an effective and vital tool in making Maryland and it's residents safe. They believe it to be more critical than the ban on assault weapons.

“What Governor O´Malley is doing here is going to change the national dialogue,“ said Vincent DeMarco, a longtime gun-control advocate who heads Marylanders to Prevent Handgun Violence. “Every state will be looking at what Maryland did and asking if that can be done here.“

"This is a huge step closer to saving many lives from gun violence," DeMarco said.

But not all agree, Del. Patrick L. McDonough, a Baltimore County Republican, vowed to mobilize the bill's opponents to petition the law onto the ballot, which would delay its effect for over a year until a vote is held in the November 2014 statewide general election. Del. McDonough also vowed to raise significant amounts of money to challenge those politicians who voted for the bill.

If the bill passes the Senate without amendments, and is signed by Governor Martin O'Malley, as expected, opponents could petition the bill to a state-wide referendum, said Del. Neil C. Parrott, a Republican from Washington County, and chairman of the petition website MDPetitions.com.

Parrott said MDPetitions.com just sent out a survey gauging the public's interest in petitioning a number of controversial issues, including death penalty repeal and O'Malley's gun bill. But it's too early to say any are definitively going to be petitioned, Parrott said.

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