

Tell the Senate to reject 'concealed carry reciprocity'

This act would force Minnesota to recognize permits from states with much laxer rules. Major events would be public safety nightmares.

Star Tribune · 13 Feb 2018 · By MIKE FREEMAN and JOHN CHOI Mike Freeman is Hennepin County attorney. John Choi is Ramsey County attorney.

A week ago, the Twin Cities welcomed an estimated 125,000 people from across the country to experience all that we had to offer and celebrate an American tradition. Thanks to the Twin Cities, U.S. Bank Stadium, 10,000 volunteers and the work of law enforcement, Super Bowl weekend was safe, with none of the major incidents that can come with a huge influx of visitors.

One of the biggest events of the year went off without any major clashes in part because of Minnesota's standards on concealed carry. Our commonsense Minnesota gun laws allowed our police officers to do their jobs and allowed football fans to partake in festivities without fearing for their safety.

We are concerned that a dangerous policy proposal now before Congress — known as “concealed carry reciprocity” — would undo the efforts we've made to keep the Twin Cities safe and turn future large public events into a public safety nightmare. The legislation would force Minnesota to allow concealed carry by many people who do not meet the standards we require for Minnesotans to carry hidden guns in public.

Minnesota ensures that people are trained and screened before they're able to carry hidden, loaded handguns. A Minnesota citizen must get a permit, which requires safety training and live-fire experience, and we prohibit stalkers, abusive boyfriends and people with convictions for violent behavior from carrying concealed weapons. To ensure the safety of all of us, our law enforcement can also deny concealed carry permits to people with other dangerous red flags in their histories.

These standards help keep Minnesotans safe every day. During Super Bowl weekend, they helped keep 125,000 visitors safe, too. To carry a concealed gun in our state, visitors must have a permit from a state with permitting laws that are like ours.

Unfortunately, many states don't hold themselves to the same standards, putting their residents in harm's way.

Some states will give almost anyone a concealed carry permit. In fact, 19 states require no training or live-fire experience at all. Other states let abusive boyfriends and convicted stalkers carry hidden, loaded weapons in their communities. And 12 states do not require a permit or a background check at all.

These lax standards — or complete lack of standards — could soon effectively become the nationwide law of the land. Just last year, the U.S. House passed the dangerous “Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act of 2017,” which would eviscerate state gun laws and make it easy for people with dangerous histories, no permit and no training to carry hidden, loaded guns in public across the country. The Senate is expected to consider the measure later this year.

As it stands now, every state decides for itself a set of standards for who can carry a concealed gun in public. Instead of creating a strong national standard, "concealed carry reciprocity" would require us to follow the laws of the least-restrictive state in the union, even here at home.

Currently, when a police officer checks to see if you have a Minnesota concealed carry permit, they can be confident you're not subject to a restraining order for abusing your girlfriend, for example. Under "concealed carry reciprocity," a person could be carrying a hidden, loaded handgun and if stopped by a law enforcement officer would only need to flash a driver's license from one of those 12 permitless states — no questions asked. With "concealed carry reciprocity" it would be difficult, or impossible, for Twin Cities officers to verify whether a person from another state is legally carrying a concealed gun in public and, in cases where they are, to know if they have a dangerous history and pose a threat.

As county attorneys in the metropolitan area, it's our job to help ensure that residents and visitors are safe and that police can do their jobs. Hosting the Super Bowl was our moment to shine, but imagine what this moment would have looked like under "concealed carry reciprocity."

It would be a recipe for chaos, making it too risky to host a large-scale, national event like the Super Bowl.

The Senate is likely to vote on this legislation in the coming months. Let's tell them to preserve the important state authority over gun safety and to keep our communities safe by rejecting "concealed carry reciprocity."