
Permit-to-Purchase Licensing for Handguns

What is permit-to-purchase licensing for handguns?

There are three general variations of permit-to-purchase (PTP) licensing laws:

- 1) Discretionary PTP laws, which require a permit to purchase a firearm and give law enforcement the discretion to refuse to issue permits;
- 2) PTP with fingerprinting laws, which require a permit to purchase a firearm and require applicants to appear at the law enforcement agency issuing the permits to be photographed or fingerprinted (but do not give law enforcement discretion to refuse to issue permits);
- 3) Non-discretionary PTP laws, which require a permit to purchase a firearm (but do not give law enforcement discretion to refuse to issue permits or require applicants to be photographed or fingerprinted)

Which states have permit-to-purchase licensing for handguns?

As of January 2013, nine states have some form of licensing system for handgun purchasers.

- Three states have discretionary PTP licensing for handguns (Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York)
- Two states have PTP licensing with fingerprinting for handguns (Connecticut, Hawaii)*
- Four states have non-discretionary PTP licensing for handguns (Illinois, Michigan, Nebraska, North Carolina)

(MA, NJ, and NY also require photographing and fingerprinting to get a handgun permit.)

What does the research say about the effects of permit-to-purchase licensing for handguns?

Research shows that discretionary PTP licensing and PTP licensing with fingerprinting prevent diversion of guns to criminals.

- A study of guns traced to crime in 53 cities that examined intrastate diversion of guns to criminals found:
 - o Discretionary PTP licensing laws were associated with 64% lower risk of diverting guns to criminals compared to states without such laws.
- A study using data on guns used in crimes in the United States in 2009¹ found:
 - o Discretionary PTP licensing laws were associated with 76% lower risk of exporting guns to criminals in other states, compared to states without such laws.
 - o PTP licensing with fingerprinting laws were associated with 45% lower risk of exporting guns to criminals in other states, compared to states without such laws.
- A recent study¹ found that Missouri's PTP licensing law prevented guns from being diverted to criminals in Missouri:
 - o In 2007, Missouri repealed their PTP licensing law, which required all handgun purchasers to apply for a permit through their local sheriff's office. At that time, the share of crime guns recovered in Missouri that originated from Missouri sellers was 55.6%. By 2011, that share had increased to 70.8%, suggesting that repeal of the PTP law made it easier for Missouri criminals to purchase guns locally. The share of guns diverted to criminals shortly after a retail sale doubled following the law's repeal.

¹ Webster DW, Vernick JS, McGinty EE, Vettes KA, Alcorn T. "Preventing the Diversion of Guns to Criminals through Effective Firearm Sales Laws." In *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis*, edited by Daniel W. Webster and Jon S. Vernick. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. Forthcoming January 2013.