

Opinion: Continue to defend law banning high-capacity gun magazines

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By: Seattle Times Editorial Board



A gun-rights supporter attends a rally in Olympia. (AP Photo / Ted S. Warren, 2018)

The fight for safer gun laws continues across the country, including in Washington this month.

In 2022, the state Legislature passed a ban on the manufacture, import, distribution or sale of high-capacity magazines for guns in what was part of a yearslong attempt to help prevent mass shootings.

A year later, the Legislature enacted a ban on the sale and distribution of assault-style weapons and a law that required a 10-day waiting period to purchase firearms, and mandatory firearm safety training.

As expected, gun advocates were not happy and vowed to challenge the ban on magazines as a violation of the state's and U.S. constitutions.

They met with some success in one case earlier this month when Cowlitz County Superior Court [Judge Gary Bashor ruled](#) that the ban on magazines that hold more than 10 rounds violates both constitutions. Bashor issued an injunction to keep the state from enforcing the law.

Attorney General Bob Ferguson was right to quickly respond with a request to the state Supreme Court to keep the ban in place while the case is on appeal, which it did. There are two similar Washington cases winding their way through federal court, [Brumback v. Ferguson](#) and [Sullivan v. Ferguson](#).

The Cowlitz County case stems from a lawsuit filed by Ferguson against Gator's Guns of Kelso for selling high-capacity magazines after the ban went into effect.

The premise behind the ban is that high capacity magazines make it easier for shooters to rapidly kill more people, and that lower capacity magazines would force a shooter to stop and reload, thus increasing the time for would-be victims to escape harm. A [study published](#) by the American Public Health Association found that the “bans appear to reduce both the incidence of, and number of people killed in, high-fatality mass shootings.”

Meanwhile on the federal front, it's refreshing that the Biden administration appears to have won a decades-long battle to close the loophole that allowed firearms to be sold at gun shows, online and at flea markets without background checks.

The new regulation [comes from the Department of Justice](#), which redefined what it means to “engage in business” to sell firearms under the [2022 Bipartisan Safer Communities Act](#). The law, introduced in 2021, was approved one month after the Uvalde, Texas, massacre that left 19 students and two teachers dead. The new rule will require anyone who sells firearms for profit at shows, markets or online to be licensed and perform background checks on buyers.

As we approach the 25th anniversary of the Columbine school shooting in Colorado this week, government officials must honor those lost there, in Uvalde and elsewhere, and keep fighting in Congress and in our courts to protect those still alive.

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