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GUN CONTROL

States' Laws and Requirements for Concealed Carry Permits Vary across the Nation

GAO-12-717, Jul 17, 2012

Highlights

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What GAO Found

The number of states allowing concealed carry permits is increasing, and states broadly differ in eligibility requirements and the extent to which they have reciprocity agreements. In June 2002, 7 states and the District of Columbia prohibited the concealed carry of handguns. As of March 2012, individuals can carry concealed handguns in all but 1 state (Illinois) and the District of Columbia. "Shall-issue" states—in which issuing authorities are required to issue a permit to an applicant that fulfills the objective statutory criteria—generally issue more permits than states with greater discretion in granting permits ("may-issue" states). Because of differing eligibility requirements, some states would issue a permit to an applicant, while others would not. For example, some states define what constitutes a disqualifying felony differently or have different firearms training requirements. As of March 2012, 39 states that issue permits and Vermont (permits not required) recognize concealed carry permits from other states. Of the 9 states that do not grant reciprocity, 8 are may-issue states.

Issuing authorities from all 9 states included in GAO's case study stated that they take action to confirm an individual's continued eligibility to hold a permit as part of the permit renewal process; and issuing authorities from 8 of these 9 states reported using mechanisms to monitor resident permit holders' continued eligibility between issuance and renewal. In these 8 states, issuing authorities told GAO that they are notified if a permit holder commits a disqualifying act within their state through law enforcement or state databases. After detecting a disqualifying criminal offense or other disqualifying factors, each of the 9 states begins the revocation process by notifying the permit holder. The states have varying retrieval processes, and 3 of them have authority to impose a penalty for failure to surrender a revoked permit or continuing to possess one. Law enforcement in the 9 case study states that issue permits told GAO that when encountering permits, such as during routine traffic stops, they visually check them and can take additional steps, such as checking state databases, as needed, to determine whether the permits are current and valid.

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Why GAO Did This Study

According to state reporting to GAO, there were at least 8 million active permits to carry concealed handguns in the United States as of December 31, 2011. States and local authorities control the issuance of concealed carry permits. Applicants who wish to obtain such permits are required to meet certain state eligibility requirements, such as minimum age and the lack of a felony conviction. States also decide which other states' permits to honor. Typically, states enter into reciprocity agreements that establish which out-of-state permit holders can carry concealed firearms within each state. In recent years, Members of Congress have introduced legislation that would require each issuing state to recognize any permit. GAO was asked to provide information on the status of concealed carry permitting. This report describes (1) the extent to which states allow concealed carry permits, and how select states' eligibility requirements and recognition of other states' permits differ, (2) what processes select states use to help ensure they revoke permits when holders no longer meet eligibility requirements, and (3) how law enforcement officials in select states determine whether permits they encounter are current and valid. GAO gathered information on the number of permits, laws, issuing authorities, and reciprocity agreements for 50 states and the District of Columbia, and conducted a case study on 9 states that issue permits. GAO selected these states to reflect differences among states' eligibility requirements, state reciprocity of permits, and permit issuing processes; the results cannot be generalized across all states but provide a broad understanding of the different requirements and processes states utilized in issuing permits.

For more information, contact Carol R. Cha (202)512-8777 or chac@gao.gov.

Additional Materials:

- Podcast: [States' Issuance of Permits to Carry Concealed Handguns](#)
- [Highlights Page \(PDF, 1 page\)](#)
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