

Support SB273

Violent Firearms Offender Act of 2020

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2/6/2020

The House failed us in 2019, and it looks like they may again. I hope the Senate can be more sensible.

Last year a bill similar to this one, HB236 (The Repeat Firearms Offender Act of 2019) came before the House Judiciary Committee and I was shocked that it did not pass. How can anyone claim to be against “gun violence” and not support legislation that toughens up penalties for violent people who use guns?

One of the arguments against that bill had something to do with the substandard literacy level of those incarcerated. I fail to see how that has anything to do with keeping illegally armed violent people off the street. Our state’s increasing murder rate continually proves that they do not need to be able to read to pull a trigger. Hopefully they could learn to read in prison...they certainly are not going to on their own on the street. I think it would be of little comfort to the families whose lives have been ruined by violent criminals to know that their loved ones were killed by someone who could not read. They *might* be able to take some solace in knowing that that violent person is locked away where they cannot hurt anyone else. Who knows, maybe the next generation of future criminals might even have second thoughts about committing violent gun crime, if they knew they might actually do the time.

This time around, as HB356, resistance (I’m still incredulous that there could be *any* resistance to incarcerating violent criminals who use illegal guns), came in the form of suggestions that a more comprehensive approach to reducing crime was needed, and that this bill could strengthen or perpetuate racial bias within the criminal justice system.

I wholeheartedly disagree with the latter statement. By taking some degree of discretion away from judges, who themselves can perpetuate certain biases, this bill would level the playing field. *All* violent criminals with illegal guns would be treated the same, regardless of the efforts of potentially biased judges. “Do the crime, do the time...it doesn’t matter who you are or where you came from.”

I absolutely agree that a more comprehensive or holistic approach is needed for violent crime in our state (and not just focused on firearms). The criminal justice system needs a paradigm shift from punishment to rehabilitation and communities need to be strengthened to steer our youth away from a life of crime before they even enter the criminal justice system. This bill and those goals are not mutually exclusive. In fact, this bill is an essential first step. Jail (as it is now) certainly is not the best solution, but it surely is better than letting violent crime go unchecked. Even if they are not getting the help they need (yet) in jail, at least these violent people are not continuing to hurt others.

Not passing this legislation puts more violent criminals with guns on the street, where they are not getting the help they need to reform their own lives and destroying the lives and families of the innocent.

Can you look your constituents in the eye and say that you did not support taking violent criminals with guns off the street? What excuse could there possibly be for allowing more violent criminals with guns out on the street? Shame on the House for not passing this last year, and hesitating this year. Shame on the Redshirts or anyone who *claims* to be against gun violence who does not support getting tougher on gun violence with this bill.

Show us that you are committed to ending gun violence and not just gun ownership by passing this bill. This is *common sense* legislation, that goes after the bad guys, for once!