

Arkansas Senate Passes Bill to Make Gun Permit Records Private

The Republican-controlled Arkansas state Senate approved a bill on Wednesday that would exempt from public disclosure the names and zip codes of gun owners, those with permits to carry concealed guns and permit applicants.

The bill comes in response to the controversy late last year over a New York newspaper's decision to publish the names and addresses of thousands of **gun permit** holders on its website after a shooting rampage at a **Newtown**, Connecticut elementary school that killed 20 children and six adults.

The ***Journal News***, which serves suburbs just north of New York City in Westchester and Rockland counties, pulled the information from its site last month.

The Arkansas bill, which passed the Senate 24-9, now moves to the state House of Representatives, which is also controlled by Republicans. Governor **Mike Beebe**, a Democrat, has said he opposes the bill because it restricts the state's Freedom of Information Act.

Republican state Senator Bruce Holland, the bill's sponsor, said he introduced the legislation after a constituent contacted him with concerns about the *Journal News'* actions.

In January, New York included a similar provision when it passed a sweeping **gun control** and mental health **law** in response to the Newtown massacre. Kansas, Oregon, South Carolina and Kentucky have similar laws, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

"You lose the element of surprise when criminals potentially have access to a public database of known gun owners," said Nicholas Stehle, a member of the board of directors of the

advocacy group **Arkansas Carry**.

Names and zip codes are “more information than I’d be comfortable sharing if I were a single woman with an abusive ex-husband,” he said.

In 2009, a similar push was made in Arkansas to restrict all information about **gun owners**. Lawmakers reached a compromise to release only the names and zip codes under the state’s **Freedom of Information Act**. Beebe signed that bill into law.

Tres Williams, communications director for the Arkansas Press Association, said the matter was not about guns but freedom of information.

“It is unnecessary and it voids the compromise from the 2009 General Assembly where we came up with how to deal with personal privacy and open government,” Williams said. “We will continue to fight this bill.”

Arkansas lawmakers are considering several gun-related bills. Earlier this week, the House approved a bill to allow concealed gun permit-holders to take their **weapons** into churches. The Senate had already passed that measure and the governor is expected to sign it into law.

*Editing by Edith Honan, Corrie MacLaggan and Peter Cooney
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