

Guns in Churches, Bars May Soon Be Georgia Reality

Georgia lawmakers on Tuesday voted to allow bars and churches to decide for themselves whether to let gun owners carry weapons into their buildings.

The measure heads for the state Senate after the members of Georgia's House of Representatives approved the legislation with a 119-56 vote, according to the chamber's Twitter account.

The rights of gun owners became a major political issue in 2012, when the United States experienced a rash of mass shootings, including a massacre that claimed the lives of 20 first-graders and six adults in Newtown, Connecticut.

Gun-control and gun-rights advocates have turned their respective efforts to statehouses after gun control legislation stalled in the U.S. Congress.

Under the Georgia bill, churches and bars would be allowed to decide whether to allow weapons inside their buildings, according to the legislation's sponsor, Rep. Rick Jasperse, a Republican.

"We don't need to be penalizing law-abiding citizens and taking away their Second Amendment rights," Jasperse said, referring to the U.S. Constitution's right to bear arms.

The legislation would also allow secondary schools to decide whether to allow teachers and administrators to carry weapons.

"The legislation does not represent the majority of people of Georgia, but only a small number of gun advocates," said Rep. Mary Margaret Oliver, a Democrat who voted against the bill.

If the bill passes, gun owners will also be able to take their

weapons into governmental buildings if security screenings are not in place, but guns would remain prohibited in courthouses and prisons.

Editing by Brendan O'Brien

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