

Law Allowing Guns in Churches Signed by Arkansas Governor

Arkansas Gov. Mike Beebe, a Democrat, signed into law on Monday a bill that allows concealed-carry permit holders to take their weapons into churches.

The Church Protection Act would allow individual places of worship to decide whether to allow concealed handguns and who could carry them. Churches that take no action will remain off-limits to guns.

The Republican-controlled House passed the bill 85-8 with bipartisan support last week. The measure previously passed the Republican-controlled Senate 28-4.

The law takes place immediately.

Gun advocates praised Beebe for his action.

"It is crucial to protecting the freedom of religion and property rights," said Nicholas Stehle, a member of the board of directors of the advocacy group Arkansas Carry.

"The state has no business meddling in the affairs of our churches," Stehle said.

Arkansas joins a handful of other states, including South Carolina, Wyoming and Louisiana, that allow guns in churches, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Reporting By Suzi Parker; Editing by Mary Wisniewski and Todd Eastham

© 2013 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.