

Keizertimes

New law protects privacy of CHL holders

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By KIM THATCHER

Imagine being stalked by a deranged individual threatening your family, but you're too afraid to exercise your constitutional right to carry a gun. Why? Because if you get a Concealed Handgun License (CHL) the stalker can find out where you live.

Until now, that was reality for a Keizer woman and many other Oregonians who worried about their safety because CHL records were released to the public.

A new state law took effect last month putting tight restrictions on the amount of information a sheriff's office or other agency can divulge about the nearly 150,000 CHL holders. The Oregon State Sheriff's Association supported the legislation I drafted, House Bill 4045, because it improves public safety while also providing limited access in certain legitimate circumstances.

Concealed Handgun License documents are not like other public records designed to hold government accountable. These records are a collection of data on individuals required to get permission from a law enforcement agency to fully exercise their Second Amendment Rights.

Publicly releasing private information about these individuals not only defeats the whole purpose of the term "concealed" but also makes them vulnerable to identity theft or other crimes; we're talking about good citizens such as the convenience store owner who has to transport cash late at night.

Opponents of these new protections say the public has a right to know if someone is packing heat. They are misled. Knowing if someone has a CHL doesn't indicate whether an individual even owns a gun, much less that they are carrying one. Conversely, many Oregonians have firearms and don't have a concealed permit. Most are responsible citizens who aren't engaged in criminal activity.

We should be more worried about the bad guys walking around carrying firearms; they don't bother getting a license. Sadly, some politicians use scare tactics to lump these criminals in with the good guys who have CHLs.

Under the new law, the courts and law enforcement agencies still have access to these records. In addition, there may be times when a victim of domestic violence or a reporter learns about someone convicted of a serious crime that might have been issued a Concealed Handgun License. This new law establishes a process for them to find out if the person has one.

Though the final version wasn't the simple bill that originally passed the House, it was the best we could do given the current political climate in Salem. We now have better protections for Oregon citizens than we did in the past. I will continue to work on common sense reforms for Oregonians who want to preserve their Second Amendment rights. Your input is always welcome.

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