



Policy Option:

HB 4357, SB 1912, & SB 1007: Banning Assault Weapons, 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles, and Large Capacity Ammunition Magazines

What does it mean?

Assault weapons are a class of semi-automatic firearms designed with military features to allow rapid and accurate spray firing. They are not designed for “sport;” they are designed to kill humans quickly and efficiently. Assault weapons have been used in many high-profile shooting incidents, including the 1999 Columbine High School massacre in Colorado, the 2002 Washington, D.C. area sniper attacks, and the 2007 Omaha mall shooting. In March of 2006, two innocent girls in Englewood, Illinois were killed by stray bullets from automatic weapon fire, one of whom was hit by a bullet shot 300 feet from her home.¹

Large capacity ammunition magazines feed ammunition automatically into the chamber of a firearm. In some cases, large capacity magazines can hold up to 100 rounds of ammunition, which enables the user to fire many times without reloading. Large capacity magazines are typically associated with machine guns or semi-automatic assault weapons, and are a particular danger because they increase the capacity and lethality of the weapons that use them.

Assault weapons and large capacity ammunition magazines were banned at the federal level from 1994 until 2004, when Congress and the President allowed the ban to expire.

Fifty caliber sniper rifles are military firearms, used by armed forces across the globe, that combine long range, accuracy, and massive power. Designed for use in urban combat situations, these weapons can penetrate structures and destroy or disable light armored vehicles, radar dishes, helicopters, stationary and taxiing airplanes, and other targets.

What would it *really* do?

A ban on assault weapons and 50 caliber sniper rifles would make it unlawful to manufacture, sell and possess semiautomatic assault weapons, large capacity ammunition feeding devices and 50 caliber sniper rifles.

Since the federal assault weapons ban expired, police departments across the country have experienced an increased presence of these high-powered weapons on the streets.² Likewise, despite their deadly power, or possibly because of it, 50 caliber sniper rifles are proliferating on the civilian firearms market, yet are subject to less regulation than handguns.³ Federal law enforcement has identified a nexus between 50 caliber sniper rifles and their use by terrorists and drug traffickers.⁴ Banning these especially lethal weapons would help save lives by making it more difficult for these military-style weapons to wind up on our streets in the hands of criminals.

Crime data also support the conclusion that a ban on large capacity magazines would have a greater impact on gun crime than a ban on assault weapons alone.⁵

What does the public think?

- Eight in 10 Illinois voters favor a law to ban assault weapons. More people with firearms behavior (including voters who are gun owners, members of the NRA, hunters and/or FOID cardholders) strongly favor an assault weapons ban (44%) than strongly oppose it (31%). When it comes to supporting a ban on the sale and possession of powerful, military-grade fifty-caliber rifles, 77% of Illinois voters support such a measure. To read more polling results from the 2007 Voter Survey on Gun Regulations, go to www.icpgv.org/icpgv_polling.html.
- National surveys conducted in 2000 and 2002 found that 67% - 71% of adults favored the federal ban on assault weapons, and 65% of registered voters favored renewal of the ban.⁶
- In November 2006, more than 85% of Cook County voters supported a referendum calling for a state-wide ban on assault weapons.

What are the facts?

- Victims killed by assault weapons are shot an average of 3.1 times, compared with 2.1 times of those shot with other types of guns.⁷
- One-fifth of the law enforcement officers slain in the line of duty between January 1998 and December 2001 were killed with assault weapons.⁸
- Studies have shown that approximately 8%-10% of adult inmates have owned assault weapons, while even higher percentages of juvenile offenders, 20%-35%, have used or owned assault weapons.⁹
- Guns equipped with large capacity magazines were involved in 14 to 26% of gun crimes prior to the assault weapon ban in 1994, compared with assault weapons, which accounted for 6% of gun crimes.¹⁰

Have Other States or Jurisdictions Enacted Similar Legislation?

California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York ban assault weapons, and Hawaii and Maryland ban assault pistols. California is the only state to have banned 50 caliber sniper rifles. California, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York have enacted laws banning large capacity ammunition magazines. In Illinois, communities banning the transfers or possession of assault weapons include Aurora, Chicago, Cicero, Cook County, Niles and Oak Park.¹¹ Chicago bans the transfer, acquisition or possession of any ammunition magazine having the capacity of more than 12 rounds.¹²

Final Thought

Anyone with a FOID card in Illinois has the ability to purchase an assault weapon such as an AK-47 or AR-15, or a 50 caliber sniper rifle. Banning assault weapons and 50 caliber sniper rifles has wide-ranging support from citizens across Illinois, law enforcement, the medical community, and both Republican and Democratic legislators. Average citizens don't want or need these deadly weapons. People want these guns off their streets and out of their communities.

Pending Legislation

HB 4357 (Sponsored by Rep Edward Acevedo)

SB 1912 (Sponsored by Senator Antonio Munoz)

This bill would make it unlawful to manufacture, sell, purchase or possess semiautomatic assault weapons, assault weapon attachments, large capacity ammunition feeding devices and 50 caliber sniper rifles and cartridges.

SB1007 (Sponsored by Sen. Kotowski)

This bill would prohibit the manufacture, sale, purchase, and possession of any large capacity ammunition feeding device, like the one purportedly used in the Virginia Tech shootings.

¹ *Assault Rifle Killed Teen, Police Say*, Chicago Tribune. Red Eye Edition. March 7, 2006, at 9.

² Kevin Johnson, *Police Needing Heavier Weapons*, USA Today, Feb. 20, 2007, at 1.

³ Violence Policy Center, *One Shot, One Kill: Civilian Sales of Military Sniper Rifles* 41-42 (May 1999); Violence Policy Center, *Voting from the Rooftops: How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden, Other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles* 62-68; and Violence Police Center, *Clear and Present Danger: National Security Experts Warn About the Danger of Unrestricted Sales of 50 Caliber Anti-Armor Sniper Rifles to Civilians* 5 (July 2005).

⁴ Office of Special Investigations, U.S., General Accounting Office, *Weaponry: Availability of .50 Caliber Semiautomatic Sniper rifles* 6-7 (June 30, 1999).

⁵ Legal Community Against Violence, *Regulating Guns in America: An Evaluation and Comparative Analysis of Federal, State and Selected Local Gun Laws*. San Francisco: Legal Community Against Violence, 2006.

⁶ CBS News/New York Times poll (May 2000). ABC News/Washington Post poll (May 2000). Lake Snell & Perry Associates, Inc. poll (sponsored by The Campaign for a Progressive Future and The Violence Prevention Campaign). *Findings on Assault Weapons from Battleground Omnibus Survey*. July 2002.

⁷ Jeffrey A. Roth & Christopher S. Koper, *Impact Evaluation of the Public Safety and Recreational Firearm Use Protection Act of 1994* 96 (1997).

⁸ Press Release, Violence Policy Center, Majority Leader DeLay's Promise to Let Assault Weapons Ban Expire Will Keep Cop-Killer Guns on U.S. Streets (May 14, 2003) www.vpc.org/press/0305delay.htm.

⁹ Marianne Zawitz, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, *Guns Used in Crime* 6 (1995).

¹⁰ Legal Community Against Violence, *Regulating Guns in America: An Evaluation and Comparative Analysis of Federal, State and Selected Local Gun Laws*. San Francisco: Legal Community Against Violence, 2006.

¹¹ Legal Community Against Violence, Illinois Local Ordinance Summary, Assault Weapons Section, at <http://www.lcav.org/states/illocalord.asp#assaultweapons>.

¹² Legal Community Against Violence, *Regulating Guns in America: An Evaluation and Comparative Analysis of Federal, State and Selected Local Gun Laws*. San Francisco: Legal Community Against Violence, 2006.