

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Whitman Signs Handgun Trigger Lock Bill

Governor Christie Whitman signed into law the Handgun Trigger Lock Bill, mandating that every handgun sold in New Jersey by a licensed dealer be equipped with a trigger lock. The bill signed today is another of the Governor's efforts to make New Jerseyans safer and more secure in their homes and communities.

"Trigger locks are designed to prevent the accidental discharge of a loaded handgun," said Gov. Whitman. "By adding this safety device to handguns, responsible gun owners can help ensure that their guns are not used by irresponsible parties - especially by children whose curiosity often exceeds their judgement, with tragic results."

"By making it more difficult for youngsters or others to misuse a handgun, this measure will save lives. But it's only one step in preventing future tragedy. I hope that responsible gun owners throughout our state will take the steps necessary to keep their firearms safely away from children," the Governor said.

A-2826, sponsored by Assembly Members James W. Holzapfel (R-Monmouth/Ocean), Paul R. Kramer (R-Mercer/Middlesex), Neil M. Cohen (D-Union), Marion Crecco (R-Essex/Passaic), Thomas S. Smith (R-Monmouth), Guy F. Talarico (R-Bergen), Peter J. Barnes, Jr. (D-Middlesex), Alfred E. Steele (D-Passaic), Nia H. Gill (D-Essex) and Senator Andrew R. Ciesla (R-Monmouth/Ocean) and John J. Matheussen (R-Camden/Gloucester), prohibits licensed dealers from transferring handguns to purchasers unless the handgun is accompanied by a trigger locking device.

The bill says that every handgun sold in New Jersey needs to be equipped with a trigger lock. A trigger lock is defined as a commercially available device, approved by the Superintendent of State Police, which is operated with a key or combination lock and prevents a firearm from being discharged (while the device is attached to the firearm).

This bill amends New Jersey's firearm laws to provide that licensed retail firearms dealers may not deliver handguns to their purchasers unless the handgun is accompanied by a trigger lock, lock box or other locking case, container or facility. Alternatives to trigger locks are also permitted because trigger locks can't be used on certain target and other specialized handguns.

A knowing violation of the bill's provisions would constitute a disorderly persons offense, which is punishable by a term of imprisonment of up to six months, a fine of up to \$1,000, or both.

The bill's requirements do not apply to antique handguns because they are often not operable and trigger locks are often unavailable for such weapons. However, the term "antique handgun" is defined in the bill, and limited to those handguns manufactured before 1898, or replicas, that are historical in nature or are of historical significance.

This legislation also includes \$90,000 that will fund a program to make trigger locks available through the county prosecutors' offices. The bill also authorizes the Superintendent of the State Police, in consultation with the Attorney General, to develop guidelines to carry out the legislation.

Gov. Whitman also urged gun owners to exercise common sense in keeping their guns away from children - as owners also need to take personal responsibility for the safety and security of their firearms.

According to the Governor, this measure is just the latest step that the Whitman administration has taken to protect New Jersey's children: "We've established gun-free school zones and a zero tolerance for weapons policy in our schools. And just last month, I announced our comprehensive V-Free Youth Initiative, which is designed to protect New Jersey's kids from violence vandalism and victimization," she said.

"Working together, and through measures like this, we can help protect New Jersey's children from accidental injury or death from handguns."