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Gun licensing continues to rise in Mass.

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By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF JANUARY 27, 2016

Tens of thousands of new gun licenses were issued to Massachusetts residents in 2015, continuing a recent surge, according to state data.

There were 342,622 active Class A firearms licenses statewide, according to figures provided by the Department of Criminal Justice Information Services earlier this month. That was up about 24,700, or 7.8 percent, from the same time a year ago.

A Class A license, the broadest license available under state law and by far the most popular, allows the holder to carry rifles, shotguns, or handguns. It also allows the holder to carry a concealed handgun.

The number of Class A licenses has increased by 104,150, or 44 percent, from five years ago.

A steady rise in the number of active Class A gun licenses in Massachusetts

Class A licenses are the broadest license type available under state law and by far the most popular.

2016



2015





SOURCE: Massachusetts Department of Criminal Justice Information Services

The increase in the popularity of gun licenses in recent years has been attributed to fears that lawmakers might impose further restrictions on gun ownership, particularly in the wake of high-profile mass shootings.

“People are rightfully concerned that they won’t be able to exercise their civil rights,” said Jim Wallace, executive director of the Northborough-based Gun Owners’ Action League of Massachusetts, an affiliate of the National Rifle Association. “Especially in this state, [the push for new regulation] just seems to never stop.”

“There is certainly fear of overregulation,” he added.

Massachusetts is considered to have some of the tightest gun restrictions in the country. Wallace said there have been campaigns for even tighter restrictions within certain cities and towns.

“There have been a number of local efforts,” said Wallace.

“It’s no longer just happening down in D.C. or on Beacon Hill, it’s happening in people’s backyards.”

He said he thought a few other factors might also be causing the increase in gun licenses.

An increasing number of women are obtaining licenses, he said.

He also said people who are between their mid-20s and mid-30s have become interested in gun

ownership, more than previous generations.

Wallace said he thought the Internet had helped the trend because it has made it easier for people to find information.

“Now, if you say, ‘I want to get involved in clay [skeet] shooting. How do I do this?’ You just get online and everything is right at your fingertips,” he said.

Wallace said there’s also increased interest in gun ownership from “people coming into the hunting world because they want natural food.”

Gun control advocate John Rosenthal said the rise in gun licenses is not a surprise.

“It’s all part of the master plan of the gun lobby, and it’s working,” said Rosenthal, a local real estate developer who is co-founder of the Newton-based nonprofit Stop Handgun Violence. “More guns, more fear — more fear, more gun violence — more gun sales.”

He said, “Sadly, more gun licenses will result in likely more accidental gun deaths. It will put more kids at risk in homes. There will be more teenage suicides. There will be more accidents from unlocked guns.”

The increase this year in the number of Class A permits was smaller than in recent years. From 2014 to 2015, the number grew by 9.1 percent, while from 2013 to 2014, the number grew by 11.2 percent.

Generally, the licenses are most popular on a per capita basis in communities west of Worcester as well as in a few places in the southeastern portion of the state.

The highest number of active Class A licenses per 1,000 residents was in the Central Massachusetts town of Oakham, at 268 licenses per 1,000 residents, followed by the western Massachusetts communities of Middlefield (265) and Peru (262).

The lowest number of licenses per capita was in Brookline, which has seven licenses per 1,000 residents, followed by Cambridge (10), and Boston (11).

About 90 percent of all gun licenses in the state are Class A licenses.

The next most common type is the Firearm Identification Card, the lowest-level gun permit, which

allows the purchase and possession of non-large capacity rifles or shotguns only.

There were 34,243 active FID cards statewide as of the start of the month, 88 more than a year ago, but about 3,150 fewer than in 2010.

The third most common type is the Class B license, which allows the purchase of all weapons sanctioned under the Class A license except for large-capacity handguns. It also does not allow a person to carry a concealed handgun.

There were 2,879 active Class B licenses as of the start of the month, 315 fewer than last year and 2,035 fewer than in 2010.

Lawmakers passed legislation in August 2014 phasing out Class B licenses. The state stopped issuing Class B permits at the start of 2015, though active ones will remain valid until they expire.

Class A, FID, and Class B permits expire after six years.

The only other type of gun possession license allows residents to have machine guns, but the only people eligible for such licenses are certified firearms instructors who train police personnel and gun collectors.

There were 1,781 active machine gun licenses statewide as of Jan. 5, records show.

Gun license applications are reviewed, and the licenses are issued, by local police departments. Application requirements can differ from one community to the next.

Gun licenses per capita in Massachusetts

A look at the number of active Class A gun licenses per 1,000 residents in each town and city statewide as of Jan. 5, 2016.

■ 49 OR FEWER ■ 50 TO 99 ■ 100 TO 149 ■ 150 TO 199 ■ 200 TO 249 ■ 250 OR MORE

SOURCE:
Massachusetts

Department of Criminal Justice Information Services

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