

Frequently Asked Questions about Gun Laws in New Hampshire

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In memoriam: The Honorable Elbert Ira “Bick” Bicknell, 1935-2020



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NHgunlaws@comcast.net.**

Scroll to the end of this article for information about the author and Pro-Gun New Hampshire.



Sam Cohen

After co-founding Pro-Gun New Hampshire in early 2006, I answered all telephone calls, as well as website inquiries, to that organization until I retired from my non-paid CEO position in September 2014, at age 70, for health reasons; before that, from June 2002 until February 2006, I similarly returned all phone calls to Gun Owners of New Hampshire. The most common calls in both cases had been questions about New Hampshire gun laws, often asked by people from other states. I particularly enjoyed talking to people thinking about moving to New Hampshire from our neighboring state to the south, because if it was the first time they learned about our freedoms compared with the government restrictions in Massachusetts, they were like kids opening Christmas presents (or rather, *dreaming about* opening Christmas presents).

I'm not a lawyer and cannot offer legal advice, but it might be useful to present a summary of how I've answered typical questions about gun laws in New Hampshire.

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Also note that this article doesn't cover hunting laws at all; for those, see the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department's website at www.wildlife.state.nh.us.

To view New Hampshire's state laws (RSAs, Revised Statutes Annotated) on line, go to the NH state government website, www.nh.gov, and click on "Laws and Rules" in the "NH at-a-glance..." box; then click on "State Statutes Online." On the resulting page, "Browse" presents a sorted index of the RSAs, by number; "Search" allows you to search by word or phrase. Note that "Title" is a rough grouping by subject; the preferred RSA citation is by chapter (colon) section-within-chapter, such as RSA 159:6 (Chapter 159, Section 6). Note: Even though NH state laws may be changed by current legislation, the "Laws and Rules" on the state website aren't updated to show such changes until the printed version of the RSAs is published, usually in October of each year.

Note to visitors to New Hampshire from other states: In general, anything in this article that applies to NH residents also applies to you, unless it's obvious that it doesn't (as with NH resident vs. non-resident Licenses to Carry, or federal laws about buying handguns as discussed in the first Q&A below).

Before we begin: It's said in Communist countries that "that which isn't permitted is forbidden." (New Jersey actually works that way for gun laws; there, everything involving guns is basically illegal, unless you qualify for an exception.) But remember, laws merely say what's *illegal*; if there's no law against something, it's legal. So don't ask if there's a law that "allows" something.

Q: What do I have to do to buy a gun in New Hampshire?

A: Go to a gun store, a gun show, or a private party selling a gun, and give them money.

If you buy a gun from a Federal Firearms Licensee ("FFL") — that is, from a gun dealer/gun store, including from a licensed dealer at a gun show — federal laws apply to the purchase; in particular, you must be at least 18 years old to buy a rifle or shotgun from an FFL, and at least 21 years old to buy a handgun. The age 21 restriction applies only to handgun purchases from FFLs, not from private parties, by the way. Age restrictions are further discussed in an appendix to this article. You can't legally possess a gun if you're a "prohibited person" — meaning someone who's been convicted of a felony, or who's been convicted of a misdemeanor "crime of domestic violence," or who falls into certain other categories as well; "prohibited persons" are further discussed in another appendix to this article. The FFL will conduct an "instant background check" by telephone to verify that you are not a "prohibited person."

By federal law, you can buy a rifle or shotgun from an FFL in a state other than your state of residence and take possession of it immediately — "cash and carry." You can buy a handgun from an FFL in a state other than your state of residence, but that FFL must ship it to an FFL in your home state, where you can pick it up after filling out the same federal paperwork that applies to an in-state purchase. In both cases, the gun must be legal to purchase and possess in your home state — which means nothing for New Hampshire residents, because NH state law doesn't restrict what kind of guns you can have, but because states like Massachusetts and New Jersey limit the types and models of guns *their* residents can purchase and possess, visitors to NH from those states can't buy anything here that they couldn't buy in their home state.

New Hampshire residents can buy guns from other New Hampshire residents without government involvement. (See the next question, however.) By federal law, a person may not buy any gun from an out-of-state private party (non-FFL) without going through FFLs.

Although it's not a legal requirement, it's a good idea to write a bill of sale for private gun sales, with both buyer's and seller's names, addresses, and (important!) signatures; information (including serial number) to identify the gun; and, importantly, the date. (Also the price, if you want to make the document a receipt as well as a record of the transfer; in that case, write "\$xxx.xx payment in full received on this date" or the equivalent.) Each party keeps a copy. The idea here is that if that gun is used criminally, one of the parties can prove that he wasn't the owner of the gun at the time — which is why you should also write "the firearm was transferred on this date" or something similar. If it's a gift rather than a sale, title it a "record of transfer," for example, instead of a bill of sale. And no, there's no legal requirement to notify the police or anyone else, and they wouldn't know what to do with a copy of a bill of sale, anyway.

If you're a resident of another state who resides in (not just visits) New Hampshire part of the time (summer home, for example), federal law considers you a resident of your home state when you actually reside there, and a resident of New Hampshire when you actually reside here. (See the Code of Federal Regulations, 27CFR478.11.) To buy a handgun in New Hampshire, ask the FFL what he or she requires in the way of documentation — utility bills, for example — to prove that you're a part-time NH resident and not just a visitor.

Q: How do I get a license or a permit to buy a gun?

A: You don't. New Hampshire doesn't require you to have a license or a permit to buy or own guns, with one exception: if you buy a handgun (rather than a rifle or shotgun) from a private party — as opposed to a licensed dealer (FFL) — then by state law (RSA 159:14) you must either have a New Hampshire License to Carry or be "personally known" to the seller. That doesn't apply to rifles and shotguns, by the way, which can be bought and sold freely between NH residents, except of course for "prohibited persons."

Note: When writing a bill or sale or record of transfer of a handgun, as per the previous Q&A, I recommend that the seller or transferor include language such as "By his [or her] signature below, seller [or transferor, if a gift] certifies (1) that buyer [or transferee] is personally known to him [or her], in compliance with New Hampshire state law RSA 159:14; and (2) that to the best of his knowledge, buyer [or transferee] is not prohibited by law from possessing firearms."

Q: How do I register my guns?

A: You don't. Welcome to New Hampshire, where the state motto, "Live Free or Die," is taken seriously, and you don't have to worry about people in uniform coming to your door to take your (registered) guns — because there's no gun registration in this state. What you own is nobody else's business.

Q: What about machine guns? Aren't they registered?

A: OK, you got me. Even though there's no state registration in New Hampshire, "machine guns" (full-auto or select-fire guns, including burst-mode capable guns), sound suppressors ("silencers"), short-barreled rifles (barrels under 16 inches) and shotguns (barrels under 18 inches), any rifle or shotgun with a total length under 26 inches, handguns with shoulder stocks, and certain other unusual guns fall under federal law (The National Firearms Act of 1934 — the "NFA") and involve special federal forms and fees. New Hampshire, unlike some other states, doesn't prohibit NFA weapons.

Note 6/26/2022: At this time the ATF — the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives — is apparently on a path to declaring that large-format pistols with a Pistol Stabilizing Brace may, "in some cases," be reclassified as short barreled rifles, which then, per NFA1934, require federal registration, payment of a \$200 "transfer tax," and further federal restrictions. I suggest doing Web searches from time to time to see where this is taking us, as the ATF rulings are in flux.

Q: Do I need a license to carry a gun?

A: No. Except for those prohibited by law from possessing a firearm, as discussed later in this article, both New Hampshire residents and visitors from other states may openly carry any firearm, carry a concealed handgun, or have a loaded handgun in a vehicle without a license.

You may not, however, have a loaded rifle or shotgun in a vehicle, per fish and game law RSA 207:7 — where "vehicle" means a motor vehicle, OHRV ("Off Highway Recreational Vehicle," meaning an ATV), snowmobile, aircraft, or powered or towed boat, but apparently not an unpowered and untowed rowboat or canoe. As of August 24, 2018, per New Hampshire's 2018 Senate Bill 500 (SB500), that restriction applies only to a *moving* vehicle; this allows hunters to load and unload their rifle or shotgun inside their (stationary) vehicle, rather than having to do so out in the cold or in a storm. Another law change effective as of that date defines "loaded" (per RSA 207:1) within all fish and game laws, meaning RSA chapters 207 through 215-D, to mean "A round or projectile in the chamber fully dischargeable by pulling the trigger," so that a rifle or shotgun with a loaded magazine but an empty firing chamber is NOT "loaded" for the purpose of the "moving vehicle" prohibition. (Before that date, RSA 207:7 specifically included "a rifle or shotgun with a cartridge in a magazine or clip attached to the gun within the prohibition. *This statutory language misused the word "clip," by the way, but I'm not going to get into esoteric — and now moot — arguments about stripper clips in certain WWI-era rifles.*)

(Another set of fish and game laws — RSAs 215-A:20 and 215-C:35 — required a license per RSA Chapter 159 to carry a loaded pistol when you're on an OHRV/ATV or a snowmobile, respectively, whether concealed or not. These restrictions were finally removed as of June 17, 2022. *I've deleted my comments about the statute naming pistols but not revolvers, because all of this is now moot.*)

Prior to February 22, 2017, open carry, with the handgun visible, was legal without a license, but concealed carry of a loaded handgun outside one's home or place of business, or having a loaded handgun in a vehicle, whether concealed or not, required a License to Carry (the paper in your wallet says "Pistol/Revolver License"). On that date, when New Hampshire became a Constitutional Carry state upon the enactment, with the governor's signature, of 2017's Senate Bill 12, that license requirement was repealed.

For those, however, who want to carry concealed in those other states that reciprocally recognize New Hampshire concealed carry licenses, a License to Carry is still available; the New Hampshire License to Carry is further discussed later in this article.

Note: In 2021, the NH state legislature passed a bill, HB334, to correct an oversight in the 2017 Constitutional Carry ("permitless carry") bill that didn't address the ATV/snowmobile carry restrictions — but HB334 also, unfortunately, included language to eliminate the State Police's "Gunline," the FBI's Point of Contact for background checks for handgun purchases, and allow those checks to go directly to the FBI's NICS system, as already used in New Hampshire for rifle and shotgun purchases — because of the Gunline's "inefficiencies." (The bill actually included that word!) The governor vetoed HB334, presumably due to objections by the State Police. The ATV/snowmobile restrictions were finally removed in June of 2022, as I mentioned above.

Q: If I transport a gun in a car, does it have to be locked in a case?

A: No. Unlike Massachusetts, New Hampshire doesn't require you to transport your guns in a locked case, or any case at all, or even to conceal them from view — although if you leave a gun visible in your parked car, you might as well accompany it with a "steal me" sign. Again, rifles and shotguns in a moving vehicle must always have their firing chambers unloaded.

Q: Are there reasons to carry a pistol or revolver concealed, rather than openly, say in an exposed belt holster?

A: Both options are legal in New Hampshire, and neither requires a license. Keep in mind, however, that some people may panic when they see a gun, and if they call the police, the police may come to investigate — but the New Hampshire Attorney General's office has made it clear that open carry is a right, and that another person's "annoyance or alarm" (a phrase taken from the NH "Disorderly Conduct" law, RSA 644:2) does not supersede that right. *I have a copy of a 2005 letter from Paul Donovan, the now retired Chief of Police of Salem, NH, documenting that statement from the NH Attorney General's office.*

On one hand, we will indeed lose our rights if we don't exercise them, but on the other hand, it's not smart to frighten or antagonize people, especially if you scare enough people to make the news — which may lead to legislation restricting open carry. Use good judgment. Hint: look and act like a responsible citizen. It helps to be neatly dressed. *(Sure enough, because a bunch of people carrying openly were rowdy in the State House during a House vote on a states' rights bill in 2009, the legislature debated two gun-ban bills, one of them against open carry in all government buildings in the state. Both bills failed, but what a pain!)*

Also, from a practical, as opposed to “political” point of view, if you're carrying openly and there's actually an armed criminal attack, you'll be the first target.

Q: What are the most important considerations about carrying a gun?

A: I shouldn't have to say this, but people new to guns (or not!) should be reminded that being armed is an awesome responsibility. Whether carrying openly or concealed (or just with a gun available), an armed person in any place or situation has to be extra careful in two ways:

(A) Safe GUN handling:

(1) MAKE A HABIT of knowing that all guns are always loaded — never assume that one is not;

(2) MAKE A HABIT of never letting a gun point at anything you're not willing to destroy (I train people to imagine a deadly laser beam coming out of the muzzle at all times);

(3) MAKE A HABIT of never touching the trigger (keep your finger out of the trigger guard!) until and unless your sights are on the target and you're actually, intentionally firing a shot; and

(4) MAKE A HABIT of, when you're preparing to shoot, being sure of your target: is that an armed home invader crouching in the dark, or is it your child? Also, for similar reasons, know where each bullet will end up if you miss your target or shoot through it.

(B) Safe PEOPLE handling: Avoid confrontations at all costs — no rude gestures, no shouting at anyone, etc., and remember that guns are, and should be, humbling; swallow your pride and stay out of prison. Avoidance is ALWAYS the best solution.

Deadly force is a deadly serious business, and shooting someone is a life-changing event. Everyone should read New Hampshire's laws on the subject — RSA Chapter 627, especially 627:4 — but the basic principle is that deadly force is an absolute last resort, when you or someone else is in imminent danger of death or serious bodily injury

(including rape), or kidnapping, and there is no other choice. (No, you may NOT use deadly force in defense of property, except to prevent arson by a trespasser. See RSAs 627:7 and 627:8.)

Yes, New Hampshire has a "Stand Your Ground" law (despite failed anti-self-defense legislation in 2013 to repeal it) — which says if you're any place you have a right to be (not just in your home) you do not have a "duty to retreat" from an attack — but I sincerely hope people don't focus on that, because it does NOT affect the basic rules of deadly force. (Again, read RSA 627:4.) Remember: IMMINENT DANGER — ABSOLUTE LAST RESORT — NO OTHER CHOICE.

The law does allow you to display a weapon to warn away a true deadly threat, but this too is serious business; if you display a gun to warn someone off, be prepared to spend your life savings on lawyers if you're forced to shoot. And if you provoked the threat, all legal defenses go out the window. Also, even if you didn't shoot, and were in the right to display a deadly weapon, you should immediately call the police to establish your innocence, because otherwise you might be prosecuted for criminal threatening, which is a felony (see RSA 631:4).

Note: The following language, effective September 21, 2021, has been added to the “reckless conduct” law,” RSA 631:3: “The act of displaying a firearm shall not, in and of itself and without additional circumstances, constitute reckless conduct under this section.” Still, be extremely cautious of “additional circumstances” that might be seen as felony “criminal threatening.”

Further: do NOT fire a warning shot, and do NOT "shoot to wound." Both of these actions are uses of deadly force, and if you are not legally justified in using deadly force (see above, and RSA 627:4), then you're looking at prison time. See RSA 631:3, "Reckless Conduct" (and yes, it's a felony).

Finally: whatever you see on TV or in movies about shooting, ignore it. It's fiction.

Q: Where can I and can I not carry? What about banks, bars, and hospitals? What about city/town halls, police stations, and state government offices?

A: The only New Hampshire *state* law restricting where you can carry is RSA 159:19, which doesn't allow guns in courthouses or courtrooms. RSA 159:26, further discussed in the next question-and-answer, prohibits counties, cities, and towns from regulating guns and ammunition, so you can carry in your city or town hall, etc. And, there is no state statute prohibiting guns in state office buildings. (In 2004, I got a large "No Firearms" sign removed from in front of the Concord building that jointly housed the headquarters of two state government departments — Health and Human Services, HHS, and the Department of Environmental Services, DES.)

By *federal* law, there are two places where you can't carry, but these federal laws are controversial; still, I advise people not to be the test case in federal court, because (a) if you lose in court, then you're going to federal prison, and (b) if you win in court, Congress may well rewrite the law to be more restrictive, because they're that way — and this actually happened in

1996; look up the 1995 US Supreme Court case *United States v. Lopez*. Here are the two federal laws:

First: Title 18, United States Code, Section 930 prohibits firearms, and also knives with blades longer than 2-1/2 inches, in federal “facilities,” which word normally means buildings — and that includes post offices.

Some may think there’s a loophole in paragraph (d) of that section, which provides an exemption for “the lawful carrying of firearms or other dangerous weapons in a Federal facility incident to hunting or other lawful purposes,” but nobody over the age of 12 thinks it’s a good idea to play amateur lawyer when you’re in handcuffs, and I’ve never heard of someone arguing that he could walk into a post office armed because his NH License to Carry was issued for “all allowable [and presumably lawful] purposes.” And in any case, the Code of Federal Regulations says no guns are allowed, and you’ll find notices posted on the door threatening you with arrest.

A federal court case in 2012 confirmed that “federal facilities” can mean not just buildings, but in many cases *any* federal property, such as post office parking lots. Federal law defines federal facilities as places where federal activities occur, and in that court case, it was noted that mail trucks used a parking lot owned by the postal service. In July of 2013, a US District Court judge in Colorado ruled in favor of a man with a gun in his vehicle in a post office parking lot (Bonidy v USPS Order), but in June of 2015 that was overturned in favor of the postal service (Bonidy et al v. U.S. Postal Service et al, 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, No. 13-1374).

Also: A 2010 federal law (Public Law 111-24) allows firearms in national parks and national wildlife refuges, if you’re carrying legally according to the laws of the state containing the federal land you’re on (and of course if you’re not a “prohibited person”).

Second: Title 18, United State Code, Section 922, subsection (q) is the Gun Free School Zones Act. You can’t have a gun in, on the grounds of (actually, on the *property* of, and that includes school buses), or within 1,000 feet of the property line of, an elementary or secondary school, whether public or private. Note that this doesn’t include colleges or universities.

18 USC 922 (q) includes exemptions for private property (i.e., you’re OK if your house is next to a school), for police officers on duty, for school-approved programs, and for unloaded guns in locked containers or locked gun racks. There’s also an exemption for people holding carry licenses from the state in which the school zone is located, but only if state law *requires* that “before an individual obtains such a license, the law enforcement authorities of the State or political subdivision verify that the individual is qualified under law to receive the license.” Keep in mind that the New Hampshire state licensing law (RSA 159:6) arguably does NOT make the cut, in part because town selectmen and city mayors can issue carry licenses, and they’re not “law enforcement authorities,” and also because that RSA doesn’t *require* law enforcement authorities to do *anything*. But even if your carry license was issued by a police chief, it may not protect you, because the RSA itself doesn’t meet the requirements of the federal law.

This federal “Gun Free School Zones Act” is unpopular (as is my reasoning above), and some people prefer to believe that New Hampshire’s carry licenses provide an exemption, despite the above analysis.* Further, nobody in New Hampshire has been arrested or prosecuted on the basis

of this federal law. Still, you have to ask yourself if you want to be the test case. Note also that a carry license from state "A" doesn't provide the school zone exemption in state "B."

** In 2006, I asked then-NH-Congressman Jeb Bradley to ask the ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives) for their reading on whether our NH License to Carry law, RSA 159:6, qualified to exempt license holders from the federal Gun Free School Zones Act. The then-Director of the ATF, Carl Truscott, wrote back on April 17 of that year — I have a PDF copy of his letter — and said that RSA 159:6 "would generally qualify as an exception." (He didn't explain what he meant by "generally.") Will the current ATF director be smarter than that? Who knows?*

By the way, it's impossible to drive through many cities in the United States without violating this law, because you're always close to some school. Fortunately, the law is rarely, if ever, enforced against people just driving through.

So, to summarize: state law prohibits you from carrying in courtrooms and courthouses; federal law, though controversial, will have you arrested and prosecuted for carrying in federal buildings (including post offices and their parking lots) and in or (technically, at least) near elementary or secondary schools.

Besides all of this, on private property — including stores, theaters, restaurants, etc. — the property owner can set a "no guns" policy, ask you to leave if you're carrying, and have you arrested for trespassing if you don't leave, but otherwise you're legal. This is discussed further in an appendix to this article.

Q: I've seen city and town parks and buildings with "no weapons" or "no firearms" signs. What about them?

A: I don't know other "weapons," but RSA 159:26, effective July 2003, declares that only the state — and not New Hampshire counties, cities, or towns — may regulate firearms (and as of August 2011, knives), and that any city or town ordinances and regulations about guns are null and void, except for zoning (for gun businesses) and hunting.

Note: State Representative Elbert "Bick" Bicknell introduced and promoted the legislation that became RSA 159:26 in 2003. Bick was soon after elected president of Gun Owners of New Hampshire, and then in 2006, became the first president of Pro-Gun New Hampshire. Attorney Evan Nappen, a knife collector, was responsible for adding knife rights in 2011 through a friendly state representative; he was also responsible for changing NH state law to legalize automatic ("switchblade") and double-edged knives.

Q: How do I get a pistol permit in New Hampshire?

A: You can't. There's *NO SUCH THING* as a New Hampshire "pistol permit."

OK, this was a trick question and answer, because it's my pet peeve. Let me explain: While some other states may issue "permits" for concealed carry, New Hampshire issues a *license*; neither the NH licensing law (RSA 159:6, "License to Carry") nor the NH license itself (the "Pistol/Revolver License" in your wallet) uses the word "permit."

Although "license" and "permit" have similar dictionary definitions (*denotations*), they have very different nuances of meaning (*connotations*). For one thing, *permits* are issued for short-term events (building permits, parade permits, fireworks permits, etc.); *licenses* are issued for the long term (drivers' licenses, electricians' licenses, nursing licenses, etc.).

But the important reminder here is that *language influences thought* — as Rush Limbaugh said, "words mean things" — and if everyone keeps saying "*permit*," people get the idea that you need the government's "*permission*" to exercise a fundamental right. ***How would you feel if you had to ask the government not for a marriage license, but for a "Permit to Marry"?*** So, please don't call our NH concealed carry license a "pistol permit" — that's actually anti-liberty propaganda.

Now, see the next question-and-answer.

Q: How do I get a concealed carry license?

A: As of February 22, 2017, neither New Hampshire residents nor visitors from other states need a concealed carry license to carry a loaded handgun concealed upon the person outside of one's home or place of business or to have a loaded handgun in a vehicle, except for an ATV or a snowmobile (which two restrictions were removed in June of 2022).

But if you would like to get a New Hampshire License to Carry (the physical license is titled "Pistol/Revolver License") for purposes of concealed carry in those other states that honor a New Hampshire license, first get an application form. New Hampshire residents can get one from your town police department, or download a blank form from the Web at

<https://www.nhsp.dos.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt461/files/inline-documents/sonh/dssp85.pdf>.

The form is only one page long; fill it out and give it to your police department. (In small towns without their own full-time police officers, the town selectmen issue carry licenses, unless they've arranged for the county sheriff to do so.) Note that the form asks "for what reason(s) do you make application to carry a pistol in New Hampshire?"; according to the law (RSA 159:6), "hunting, target shooting, or self-defense shall be considered a proper purpose. The license shall be valid for all allowable purposes regardless of the purpose for which it was originally issued." In other words, NH concealed carry licenses are unrestricted, unlike in some states whose licenses may say things like "for hunting and target shooting only." Licenses are issued for a minimum of five years; the law says "When required, license renewal shall take place within the month of the fifth anniversary of the license holder's date of birth following the date of issuance." The fee is ten dollars, payable when you pick up your license.

If you have a resident License to Carry and move from one town or city to another within New Hampshire, RSA 159:6-b, II, says "When the licensee hereunder ceases to be a resident of the community in which the license was issued he shall notify in writing the issuing authority at his

new place of residence that he has a current license. Such license shall remain in effect until it expires pursuant to RSA 159:6.”

Non-resident licenses (for those who are not residents of New Hampshire), issued by the state police, cost \$100 (raised from \$20 in July of 2009). Download a non-resident application form at <https://www.nhsp.dos.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt461/files/inline-documents/sonh/dssp260.pdf>

On July 17, 2013, the New Hampshire "Administrative Rule" (which has the force of law) about non-resident carry licenses was changed to require the non-resident applicant to have a "a license to carry a pistol or revolver concealed in the state where the applicant resides" — whereas earlier, NH non-resident licenses could be issued to applicants who had a concealed carry license issued by ANY state. However, the NH Supreme Court case “Scott L. Bach & a. v. New Hampshire Department of Safety,” decided on June 2, 2016, overturned the requirement that applicants for a NH non-resident License to Carry be licensed by *any* state. The NH Department of Safety updated their website on October 25, 2016. (*Attorney Scott Bach is the longstanding president of the New Jersey Association of Rifle and Pistol Clubs, the New Jersey state NRA affiliate; he’s also a member of the NRA Board of Directors, and a personal friend.*) It’s almost impossible to get a New Jersey carry license, something that was mentioned in the court ruling. Also, this change eliminated the previous requirement for residents of Vermont — which doesn’t require or issue concealed carry licenses — to submit a letter from their local police departments when applying for a New Hampshire non-resident carry license. In other words, Scott Bach’s successful lawsuit means that non-resident NH carry licenses are issued or denied using the same criteria as for a resident license (although with a different application form). The State Police website, in an update dated October 25, 2016, mentioned Scott’s case, but that web page has been removed.

Q: Who can get a concealed carry license?

A: Anyone who isn’t prohibited by New Hampshire or federal statute from possessing a firearm (see the appendices to this article on "prohibited persons" and "age restrictions on handguns") can be issued a License to Carry.

[*Note: the remainder of this paragraph, which was followed by further text which is now deleted, is “left over” from before February 22, 2017, when the license issuing law, RSA 159:6, was changed from requiring the applicant to be a “suitable person” to simply not being legally prohibited from possessing a firearm. Nevertheless, I’m leaving in the fundamental information, even though it’s hard to imagine it being necessary now.*] State law (RSA 159:6 and 159:6-c) provides that if you’re denied a license, the issuing authority must give you the reason(s) for denial in writing within 14 days of the application; you have 30 days to ask the local district or municipal court for a hearing; the court must hold a hearing within 14 days after that; and “during this hearing the burden shall be upon the issuing authority to demonstrate by clear and convincing proof why any denial, suspension, or revocation was justified, failing which the court shall enter an order directing the issuing authority to grant or reinstate the petitioner’s license.” Note that "clear and convincing" is a well-understood standard legal phrase that equates to a pretty high standard; in other words, the law is in your favor here.

Q: My local police department says that they will take more than 14 days to process my application for a concealed carry license; they gave me an instruction sheet (besides the standard one-page application form); they require more than three references; they require my references to send letters to the police department; they require documented proof of firearms training; and they want fingerprints and photographs. Which of these actions are legal?

A: None of them. RSA 159:6 requires that licenses shall be issued or denied within 14 days of application, that “no other forms [other than the state-standard one-page form for NH residents, DSSP 85, or the two-page non-resident form, DSSP 260] shall be used,” and that no fingerprints or photographs may be demanded (although a government-issued photo ID, normally a driver’s license, is typically needed to prove identity and residence). RSA 159:6-e provides that you may petition the superior court of your county, with or without a lawyer, to order an issuing authority to comply with the issuing law (159:6) if they violate it, and RSA 159:6-f provides that issuing authorities who violate the law may be personally liable to you for court costs and attorney’s fees, provided that “the court finds that the entity or person knew or should have known that the conduct engaged in was a violation of this chapter” — which you could ensure by printing out a copy of RSA 159:6 and delivering it to your police department.

Most police departments follow the law, but since the most common violation is delay beyond 14 days (I’ve heard that the Manchester PD actually told applicants that licensing “may take several weeks”!!), I recommend that you find some way of proving when you delivered your completed application to the police, such as having a witness attend. Also, while some people may not want to antagonize their local police department by going to court, a police department that delays issuing your license may well respond to a polite reminder about RSAs 159:6-e and -f. In the spring of 2012, there was a newsworthy court case as a result of a New Hampshire police chief ignoring a License to Carry application *months* beyond the statutory 14-day deadline; the chief was ordered to issue the license and pay thousands of dollars in attorney fees and court costs.

Q: If my car is pulled over by the police, do I have to tell the officer that I’m (legally) carrying?

A: NH law doesn’t require that you notify the police officer that you’re armed (but before he asks), and the subject is debatable. One opinion (mine) is that if your gun is truly concealed, and there’s nothing that would suggest to the officer that you’re carrying, then there’s no reason to notify him; after all, some younger police officers (including recent Massachusetts transplants) may panic and have you spread-eagled on the ground. But of course you should tell the officer that you’re legally armed if he asks you (do NOT lie to the police!), and I further strongly suggest you should do so if there’s any chance he’d suspect you’re carrying, or if the gun would be noticed during your conversation with him — especially if he asks you to step out of the car.

If you do notify the officer for any of these reasons, or if you simply choose to do so, I suggest that you don’t say the word “gun,” because police are trained to react urgently to that word. Instead, I recommend keeping both hands on the steering wheel and saying something like

"Officer, as a courtesy, I want to tell you that I'm carrying in a belt holster on my right side, under my jacket; what would you like me to do?"

As a matter of training, the officer will most likely disarm you for his own safety during the conversation – and in some cases may even unload the handgun before returning it (and the ammunition) to you. A smart officer will also ask if you have any *other* weapons on you.

Q: I've seen magazine advertisements for badges that say "Concealed Carry Permit," or something similar, often attached to a leather wallet-size folder to hold the permit/license itself. Are these a good idea for someone with a NH License to Carry ("Pistol/Revolver License")?

A: No! They're designed to look like police badges, and that's exactly what makes them evidence that one is impersonating a police officer – a FELONY in New Hampshire. See New Hampshire RSAs 104:28-a ("False Personation") and 106-B:15-a ("Exhibiting Insignia of State Police"). Although RSA 104:28-a says "with the intent to be recognized as [a law enforcement officer]," a court is quite likely to agree that the very nature and purpose of the badge is to have people think you're a police officer – thereby verifying "intent." Don't do it!

Q: Is my New Hampshire License to Carry valid in other states?

A: Only in those states with which New Hampshire has reciprocity, meaning states that agree to recognize our licenses if we recognize theirs, or in Constitutional Carry* states which allow "permitless carry" for visiting non-residents. There are currently (as of June 25, 2022) 28 reciprocating states, listed on line: go to www.nh.gov; click on and hold the "Government" tab near the top of the page as you move down its pull-down menu to "All Links for Government"; then click on "State Agencies" under the "Executive Branch" heading on the left; then click on "Division of State Police" under "Safety" within the "S" group; then click on "Permits and Licensing Unit" under "Quick Links" on the left. The result will be <https://www.nhsp.dos.nh.gov/our-services/justice-information-bureau/permits-and-licensing/pistol-and-revolver-licensing>. [*The state website is always changing; I got to the Pistol and Licensing Unit of the NH State Police with a Web search for "NH pistol licensing."*] No, Massachusetts isn't on the list. (For you sissies afraid of the cold, note that Florida is on the list.) And, of course, you don't need a license to carry concealed in Vermont (because of a ruling by the Vermont state supreme court in 1903), nor, as of October 2015, Maine, which adopted Constitutional Carry in that year.* (Maine's law also allows you to have a loaded handgun in a vehicle without a carry license, as does New Hampshire as of 2/22/17.) Be aware that if you go to these states, you must follow their gun laws, which may be more restrictive than New Hampshire's; in Georgia, for example, you may not carry at political rallies. Also, some of those states limit reciprocity to those 21 and older, as shown on the NH State Police website above. And be sure to have your carry license with you. (NH law requires that of visitors from reciprocal states.) If you're curious, the website www.handgunlaw.us provides useful summaries of handgun laws in other states — just note their disclaimers.

* Constitutional Carry means that you can carry without a license, although in Constitutional Carry states other than Vermont, licenses are still available (at least to state residents) for the purpose of reciprocity with other states. There are now (June 2022) 25 states with Constitutional Carry laws, although some of those states limit constitutional carry to those age 21 and older, and Idaho, North Dakota, and Wyoming require carry licenses for non-residents. Maine's law still requires a license to carry concealed in their state parks and in Acadia National Park, and to carry at all if you're under 21, but Maine also has carry license reciprocity with New Hampshire. For more information about Maine, see <https://www.maine.gov/dps/msp/licenses-permits/concealed-carry-maine>.

If you want to carry as best you can travelling from New Hampshire to Florida, it will be a long trip, but you can carry going west through Vermont; then use federal law 18USC926A (see the next Q&A) to transit New York state withOUT carrying; then, with your New Hampshire License to Carry (i.e., Pistol/Revolver License), you can legally carry in a route through PA, WV, KY, TN, GA, and FL, all of which have reciprocal carry agreements with NH.

Q: How can I take my guns on trips to another state?

A: The federal Firearm Owners' Protection Act of 1986 — 18USC926A — supersedes state and local anti-gun laws for interstate travelers, under certain conditions. It says that if you can "lawfully possess and carry" a gun at both the beginning and end of an interstate trip, you may legally transport it interstate if it is unloaded and in a locked container inaccessible from the passenger compartment of the vehicle; ditto for any ammunition. If the car doesn't have a lockable trunk, then the unloaded handgun(s), rifle(s), or shotgun(s), and any ammunition, must be in a locked container (an attaché case would work for handguns), but specifically not "the glove compartment or console." Note that courts have held that to be protected by this law, the trip must be reasonably direct; that is, you may stop for meals, gas, or even to sleep overnight, but if you were to stop to see a movie, for example, in a state where your possession of the gun would be illegal, you would lose the protection of the federal law. (So don't play golf in New Jersey on your way to Florida.) Also, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland — all anti-gun states — are notorious for arresting gun carriers despite the federal law, forcing those people to use the federal law as an affirmative defense in court.

Q: What if I want to visit Massachusetts?

A: **WARNING – WARNING – WARNING!** Unless you have a Massachusetts non-resident License to Carry, bringing a firearm into Massachusetts is a FELONY, with minimum mandatory imprisonment of 18 months! And, believe it or not, bringing an EMPTY CARTRIDGE OR SHELL CASING — which Massachusetts considers an “ammunition component,” even if it's a non-reloadable .22 rimfire case — can also get you jailed, in this case for up to two years.

You can verify all this by contacting Gun Owners' Action League, the primary gun-rights organization in Massachusetts: www.goal.org, phone 508/393-5333. GOAL can also tell you about certain exceptions, in particular for hunting and formal competitions, but be careful and make sure you have the correct paperwork. Yes, the federal law cited in the previous question-and-answer is supposed to protect you if you travel THROUGH Massachusetts, although local MA police may not be familiar with it (ditto New Jersey, which is even more horrible), but not if you're VISITING Massachusetts.

Q: Where is it legal to shoot?

A: Per state law (RSAs 207:3-a, 207:3-c, and 644:13), you may not shoot across or within 15 feet of a road, or “within 300 feet of a permanently occupied dwelling without permission of the owner or the occupant of the dwelling or from the owner of the land on which the person discharging the firearm or shooting the bow and arrow is situated.”

You also may not discharge a firearm within the “compact part of a town or city,” defined as “the territory within a town or city comprised of the following:

“(a) Any nonresidential, commercial building, including, but not limited to, industrial, educational, or medical buildings, plus a perimeter 300 feet wide around all such buildings without permission of the owner.

“(b) Any park, playground, or other outdoor public gathering place designated by the legislative body of the city or town.

“(c) Any contiguous area containing 6 or more buildings which are used as either part-time or permanent dwellings and the spaces between them where each such building is within 300 feet of at least one of the others, plus a perimeter 300 feet wide around all the buildings in such area.”

Further, it's just common sense and courtesy to ask permission of the landowner to shoot on private property, even if there is no “permanently occupied dwelling” within 300 feet.

In addition, when shooting on private property, you should be aware of RSA 644:2, III, the subsection of New Hampshire's Disorderly Conduct law that deals with noise.

For target shooting, many people belong to a gun club, and there are many of them in New Hampshire; the local police can tell you where they are. An excellent resource is the website www.WhereToShoot.org (not .com), a product of NSSF, the National Shooting Sports Foundation. You can also find a list of shooting clubs compiled by the state Fish and Game department at <http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/hunting/clubs-ranges.html>. While the clubs require you to be a club member or guest of a member, there are two open-to-the-public commercial indoor shooting ranges in the state (at least that I know of): the Manchester Firing Line (668-9015, website www.gunsnh.com) and Belmont Firearms and Range (524-8678, website www.belmontfirearms.com).

New Hampshire state parks and certain other state properties generally allow target shooting and hunting, but with restrictions about where (not within 300 feet of developed areas) and when (not

between Memorial Day weekend and Columbus day weekend within 1/4 mile of developed recreation areas); also, “Fully jacketed, armor piercing, steel core and tracer ammunition shall be prohibited.” There are other restrictions as well; for more information, see Administrative Rule 7300 at http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rules/state_agencies/res7300.html and search for “firearm.”

Q: Is there a law about leaving guns around where kids can get them?

A: Yes. RSA 650-C:1, Negligent Storage of Firearms, makes it a violation with a fine of up to a thousand dollars, if you store or leave a loaded handgun around where a child under 16 can get it, and he or she uses it “in a reckless or threatening manner,” or in a crime, or shoots it “negligently or recklessly.” There are many exceptions, including if the child has had official safety training or a hunter education course, or if the gun is used in lawful self-defense of the child or another.

There’s some interesting history behind this law, which became effective in 2001: It was originally going to be a *felony*, but State Rep. David Welch, whom I’m proud to call a friend, maneuvered it down in the legislature to just a violation (like a traffic ticket, although expensive), and added all the exceptions.

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I hope this helps your understanding of New Hampshire gun laws. If you have any questions, email me as shown at the beginning of this article, or contact an attorney familiar with NH gun laws.

Appendices follow

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APPENDIX 1: “Prohibited persons” per federal law and NH state law

Federal law — Title 18 United States Code Section 922, subsection (g) — 18USC922(g) — prohibits possession of firearms or ammunition by: convicted felons (actually, persons who have been convicted of a crime potentially punishable by imprisonment of more than a year, with the exception, per 18USC921(a)(20)(B), of state misdemeanors punishable by imprisonment of two years or less); fugitives from justice; users of illegal drugs; someone “adjudicated as a mental defective or who has been committed to a mental institution”*; illegal aliens; those who have been dishonorably discharged from the military; those who have renounced their US citizenship; those subject to domestic restraining orders; and those convicted of “misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence.” For both felonies and domestic violence misdemeanors, it doesn’t matter how long ago the conviction was; the prohibitions are for life, unless the person is pardoned or has his rights restored through expungement (called annulment in New Hampshire)**. Violation of this law is a federal felony with a ten-year prison sentence. When you “receive” a firearm from an FFL, you sign ATF Form 4473, which asks if you fall into any of the “prohibited person” categories; making false statements on this form is itself a federal felony.

A “loophole” is that the federal firearms prohibition does NOT include muzzleloaders (both modern and antique), nor firearms manufactured before 1899 (actually made then, not modern replicas).

In some ways, however, New Hampshire state law is actually more restrictive than federal law: per RSA 159:3, anyone who has been convicted of a felony “against the person or property of another,” or a drug felony, is prohibited from possession of not only firearms, but ANY “deadly weapon as defined in RSA 625:11, V,” which means “any firearm, knife or other substance or thing which, in the manner it is used, intended to be used, or threatened to be used, is known to be capable of producing death or serious bodily injury.” (So, unlike federal law, NH state law prohibits convicted felons from possessing muzzle-loaders.)

** The mental health disqualifier isn't simple, but basically, “adjudicated as a mental defective,” in New Hampshire, means that a judge has signed a court order certifying that you are a “danger to yourself or others,” or are incompetent to handle your affairs; and “committed to a mental institution” does not include voluntary admission, or emergency commitment for three-day observation. (The Veterans Administration runs under separate rules, including a federal law providing for “un-prohibiting” firearm possession.)*

*** Expungement/annulment must be done in the state, and usually the court, where the conviction occurred. Unfortunately, Massachusetts doesn't have expungement; they will “seal one's records,” but that only hides the conviction from employers, landlords, etc. — it does not remove the federal gun-possession prohibition of a felony or domestic violence misdemeanor conviction. A suggested possible remedy may be to have a very talented Massachusetts attorney re-open the case, but this is a long shot.*

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APPENDIX 1-A: "Domestic violence" misdemeanors

While most states do not use the words “domestic violence” in the formal names of their laws, federal law — 18USC921(a)(33) — defines a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence as a misdemeanor that “has, as an element, the use or attempted use of physical force, or the threatened use of a deadly weapon, committed by a current or former spouse, parent, or guardian of the victim, by a person with whom the victim shares a child in common, by a person who is cohabiting with or has cohabited with the victim as a spouse, parent, or guardian, or by a person similarly situated to a spouse, parent, or guardian of the victim.”

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APPENDIX 2: Age restrictions on handguns

First, let's clear up a common misconception: Some people — and police, apparently — think that no-one under 21 can legally buy or possess a handgun, but that's incorrect; the only “under 21” restriction is that people under 21 can't receive a handgun *from a licensed dealer* (FFL, Federal Firearms Licensee). In New Hampshire, people aged 18, 19, or 20 can legally buy a handgun from a private party, and are commonly issued concealed carry licenses.

The difficulty arises when someone is under 18. New Hampshire state law (RSA 159:12) doesn't allow anyone to "sell, barter, hire, lend or give" a handgun to a minor, with exceptions for (a) those supervising minors during a "supervised firearms training program" or a "lawful shooting event or activity" (which arguably includes casual target shooting); (b) licensed hunters accompanying minors on a lawful hunt; and (c) parents, grandparents, or guardians who "give a pistol or revolver to their children or wards." (An odd historical note: Prior to August 24, 2018, when NH 2018 Senate Bill 500 took effect, the statute didn't say "pistol or.")

And then there's federal law. Title 18, United States Code, Section 922, subsection (x) — 18USC922(x) — deals with "juveniles" (defined as those under 18) and handguns. It says that a juvenile may not possess a handgun or handgun ammunition except for use (1) in the course of employment, or for ranching/farming "at the direction of an adult," or for hunting, or for target shooting, or in the course of "instruction in the safe and lawful use of a handgun" ...**AND** (2) with the "prior written consent" of a parent/guardian *in his or her possession*. (Further, the parent/guardian must not be a "prohibited person" himself/herself.) There are exceptions for juveniles in the armed services possessing handguns in the course of duty, for transfer of title (but not possession) by inheritance, and for defense against a home invader.

Although the New Hampshire state law on issuing concealed carry licenses (RSA 159:6) does not mention age, in practice those under 18 were denied prior to February 22, 2017, with New Hampshire police seeming to agree on the explanation that they're not "suitable persons" (per RSA 159:6 prior to that law's revision on 2/22/17) because as minors, they're "not responsible for their actions." As of February 22, 2017, when RSA 159:6 was modified to eliminate the undefined "suitable person" requirement, this argument has disappeared, and it's not clear whether concealed carry licenses will be issued to those under 18 years of age, or whether the courts may find that the above-quoted federal law means that juveniles are "prohibited by statute from possessing a firearm in the state of New Hampshire" and therefore denied a concealed carry license.

A more important question is whether the police and courts will find a reason to prohibit unlicensed concealed carry by minors, since federal law doesn't completely prohibit a minor from possessing a handgun, and there is no New Hampshire statute prohibiting minors from possessing a handgun given to them by "parents, grandparents, or guardians" (per RSA 159:12, referenced above). I'll revise this paragraph as I find further information.

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APPENDIX 2-A: Age restrictions on rifles and shotguns

By federal law, gun stores/dealers (FFLs) may not sell/transfer rifles or shotguns ("long guns," as opposed to handguns) to people under 18. As far as I know, that's the only restriction in either federal or NH state law on minors buying or possessing long guns.

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APPENDIX 3: Trespass

RSA 635:2 says that “A person is guilty of criminal trespass if, knowing that he is not licensed or privileged to do so, he enters or remains in any place.” The statute continues to say that criminal trespass is a misdemeanor if a person “knowingly enters or remains...in any place in defiance of an order to leave or not enter which was personally communicated to him by the owner or other authorized person.” (Otherwise it’s a “violation,” which is less than a misdemeanor.)

Keep in mind that RSA 159:26 says that only the state and not “political subdivisions” of the state can control guns (so you can carry in your town or city hall, for example), but here we’re talking about private property: if you carry a gun into a store or restaurant, for example, that doesn’t want you to, and an employee asks you to leave, you’re committing misdemeanor trespass if you refuse to do so. (Note that even a low-level employee, like a checkout clerk at a large store, would be considered an “authorized person” for the purposes of the RSA.) According to an attorney, if you’re ordered to leave, that order legally persists; you’d be breaking the law if you returned to that place the next day, for example.

A building with a sign at its entrance declaring that no guns (or “weapons”) are allowed, however, is another matter: If you are discovered to be carrying within such a place, but are *not* asked to leave, it is arguably unlikely that you could be prosecuted for violating the trespassing statute, at least not at the misdemeanor level. (And incidentally, there’s another statute, RSA 635:4, that specifies that signage prohibiting specified activities, such as hunting or trespassing, on private property shall be “printed with block letters no less than 2 inches in height, and with the name and address of the owner or lessee of such land” and that such signs “shall be posted not more than 100 yards apart on all sides and shall also be posted at gates, bars and commonly used entrances.”)

The law is unclear if an armed person entering a building with a “no weapons” sign “is not licensed or privileged to do so,” but the worst interpretation of the statute is that he would be guilty of a violation rather than a misdemeanor.

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APPENDIX 4: Confrontations with police involving guns

If police have a “reasonable suspicion” that that a person has been, or is about to be, involved in a crime, they have the right to do a quick surface search of his outer clothing to look for weapons, in part for their own protection. This is called a “Terry frisk” because of a landmark 1968 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Terry v. Ohio*.

Attorney Evan Nappen’s business cards summarize his advice on serious police confrontations, including what to do after a self-defense shooting, using the three letters “**SAC**” (reminiscent of the Air Force’s Strategic Air Command): “**S**” reminds you to remain **Silent** (until you’ve spoken with your attorney); “**A**” reminds you to ask for your **Attorney** (before saying anything else to the police); and “**C**” tells you to not give your **Consent** to the police for anything, notably including searches of your vehicle or residence.

As I wrote earlier, self-defense shootings are life-changing events. What should you do afterwards? To begin, here are four common-sense guidelines: (a) Don’t leave the scene! For the police and the courts, “flight equals guilt.” (b) In a similar vein, and for a similar purpose,

try to be the first to call the police, or shout for someone else to do so, immediately. This helps establish your innocence. (c) Never lie to the police or falsify evidence (yes, they can tell if you've "dragged the body indoors"). (d) For your own safety, don't have a gun in your hands when the police arrive. By the way, similar advice (especially "(b)," above) also applies if you just display a weapon to warn off a deadly threat; you don't want to be accused of criminal threatening, which is a felony (see RSA 631:4).

Going beyond Attorney Nappen's above "SAC" advice, Massad Ayoob, the well-known police trainer, courtroom expert witness, and firearms author (also sworn police officer, champion shooting competitor, and an old friend of mine), teaches students at his Lethal Force Institute classes to do the following five things when the police arrive after a self-defense shooting: **First**, tell the police that "This man attacked me." (That makes it clear from the beginning that you're the victim and the other person is the perpetrator.) **Second**, say "I will sign the complaint." (Ayoob says that this tells the police that you're speaking their language, and reinforces that you're the Good Guy and the other person is the Bad Guy.) **Third**, point out the evidence. (If you don't, the attacker's knife, spent shell casings, or whatever, can disappear or be moved.) **Fourth**, point out the witnesses. (Unfortunately, some people "just don't want to get involved," even when their testimony can prove your innocence.) **Fifth**, and most importantly, tell the police that they will have your full cooperation after you've spoken with your attorney – and stick to that. (Mas writes, "Experts tell us that it will be a minimum of 24 to perhaps 72 hours before you'll be in any condition to deal with a full interrogation. And that interrogation – the more politically correct term "interview" is used now – should not take place until you've discussed it with your attorney in depth. Nor should it take place, in my opinion, without the attorney right there with you, and a legal stenographic service's camcorder rolling to record it for your side, just in case.")

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I posted the original version of this article on freestateblogs.net in January 2006, when I was still with Gun Owners of New Hampshire; a few months later, when we started Pro-Gun New Hampshire, I re-posted it on PGNH.org. It's now on www.nhgunlaws.info (which is also redirected from www.nhgunlaws.org and www.nhgunlaws.com). I've updated it several times over the years.

Self-indulgent Mutterings by the Author

I was a co-founder (with "Bick" Bicknell), and the (unpaid volunteer) Chairman, Executive Vice President, and CEO, of Pro-Gun New Hampshire, Inc. (PGNH), retiring from that organization for health reasons in September of 2014, at age 70, after eight and a half years. Unfortunately, although PGNH gained a respected reputation and several thousand members, the other Board members didn't maintain the organization after I retired; the telephone — (603) 226-PGNH (7464) — was disconnected, and the website — PGNH.org — was taken over by a vendor of electrical connectors. Further, since I left in 2014, there have not been any meetings of the Board of Directors or the Council of Advisors (which the bylaws require every two years to elect

a new president), although some PGNH members have received a few emails over the years from Bob Clegg, the Pro-Gun New Hampshire president elected in the spring of 2014, about forthcoming firearms bills in the NH state legislature. The organization is essentially gone. However, a new website, progunnh.org, was established some years ago, but until 2021, it was still “under construction”; now — using the name “ProGun New Hampshire” (and later “Pro Gun NH”) instead of Pro-Gun New Hampshire — it contains (only) a form to sign up for an email newsletter and a request to “follow us on Facebook.” No membership dues are mentioned. It still uses the PGNH logo (see below).

Before co-founding PGNH, I was a Director of Gun Owners of New Hampshire, Inc. (GO-NH), the official state NRA affiliate organization, from 2001 to 2006, and from 2002 to 2006 was also the GO-NH Legislative Liaison, testifying on behalf of GO-NH at state legislative hearings.

In early 2006, eight of the 19 Board members of Gun Owners of New Hampshire, including the president, State Representative Elbert “Bick” Bicknell, whom I had brought in two years earlier, three other state legislators, and four others including me, resigned from the GO-NH Board of Directors — because the other 11 decided they didn’t want legislators on the Board (thereby insulting the legislature that had kept gun rights pretty well protected in the state). Bick asked me to help start a new organization to “lobby the legislature from the inside” for gun rights, and recruit legislators and others respected by the legislature for our leadership.

(Warning: Shameless self-promotion coming.) I proposed the name Pro-Gun New Hampshire, designed the logo (below), created the website, and drafted the bylaws. I set up the corporate officers like the NRA in miniature, so that we had a president elected every two years plus a more or less permanent Executive Vice President and Chief Executive Officer: me — although unlike the NRA’s EVP/CEO Wayne LaPierre, I didn’t have a million dollar salary. (In fact, my job paid zero; I didn’t even have a tip jar.)



Over the years, I maintained the PGNH website and wrote everything on it except those articles bylined by others, and, as an obsessive language freak, I copy-edited those. I also replied to all the email contacts, returned all phone calls, and, until 2014, when it became difficult for me to walk, staffed our recruiting table at gun shows and testified at legislative committees for the organization. (I tried, but see if YOU can find help who’ll work for no money AND who can write proper English.)

But I’m proud to have befriended a number of New Hampshire legislators and other state officials, as well as many other supporters of our fundamental, natural, and Second Amendment-guaranteed Right to Keep and Bear Arms. It’s been an interesting ride, but now I get to sit in a comfortable recliner and relax with my 25-years-younger girlfriend (hah!), our four small terriers, and some favorite pistols and revolvers. Plus Netflix.

Sam Cohen

