

MODIFY PENALTY FOR CERTAIN VIOLATIONS BY HOLDER OF EXPIRED CONCEALED PISTOL LICENSE

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House Bill 4003 as referred to second committee
Sponsor: Rep. Matt Hall
1st Committee: Military, Veterans and Homeland Security
2nd Committee: Judiciary
Complete to 8-18-21

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

BRIEF SUMMARY: House Bill 4003 would amend the Michigan Penal Code to establish a civil fine, instead of the current felony penalty, for carrying a concealed pistol on an expired concealed pistol license (CPL) if the license had expired within the previous year.

FISCAL IMPACT: House Bill 4003 would have an indeterminate fiscal impact on the state and on local units of government, yet would not have a significant fiscal impact on the Department of State Police or local law enforcement agencies. (See **Fiscal Information**, below, for more information.)

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

A CPL allows a person to carry a concealed pistol (with some restrictions) on his or her person and also in a vehicle whether the pistol is concealed or not. Similarly to a driver's license, a CPL expires on the holder's birthday, but, depending on the date of issue, a CPL may be valid for four to five years. Just as people sometimes forget to renew their driver's licenses, a person may forget to renew his or her CPL. Carrying a concealed pistol after the CPL expires can result in a felony conviction with a prison sentence of up to five years and a fine that can be as high as \$2,500, or both. Some believe that this penalty is excessive for an act that is often due to forgetfulness rather than a criminal intent to skirt the law. Legislation has been offered to apply a lesser penalty for a license that had recently expired.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

Currently under the code, an individual who does not have a CPL is prohibited from publicly carrying a pistol concealed on or about his or her person or, whether concealed or not, in a vehicle he or she is riding in or operating. Even if licensed, he or she cannot carry a pistol in a place or manner inconsistent with any license restrictions. A violation is a felony punishable by imprisonment for up to five years or a fine of up to \$2,500, or both.

Under the bill, a CPL holder who carried a pistol in a vehicle or concealed on his or her person after the license expired would be subject to a civil fine of \$330, instead of the felony penalty described above, if both of the following conditions were met:

- The CPL expired not more than one year before the date of the violation.
- The person was eligible to obtain a CPL under section 5b of 1927 PA 372, the handgun licensure act.

Further, if the person received a renewal license within 60 business days after the violation, he or she would not be subject to the civil fine.

MCL 750.227

FISCAL INFORMATION:

House Bill 4003 would have an indeterminate fiscal impact on the state and on local units of government. The fiscal impact would depend on the number of offenders who would be assigned a civil fine instead of convicted of a felony under provision of the bill. Fewer felony convictions would result in reduced costs for the state correctional system. In fiscal year 2020, the average cost of prison incarceration in a state facility was roughly \$42,200 per prisoner, a figure that includes various fixed administrative and operational costs. State costs for parole and felony probation supervision averaged about \$4,300 per supervised offender in the same year. Those costs are financed with state general fund/general purpose revenue. Any decrease in penal fine revenues would decrease funding available for local libraries, which are the constitutionally designated recipients of those revenues. The state could see an increase in civil fine revenue, which is typically deposited into the state Justice System Fund, which supports various justice-related endeavors in the judicial and legislative branches of government and the Departments of State Police, Corrections, Health and Human Services, and Treasury. The fiscal impact on local court systems would depend on how the provisions of the bill affected caseloads and related administrative costs.

The bill would not have a significant fiscal impact on the Department of State Police or local law enforcement agencies.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Proponents argue that the bill would establish a more reasonable penalty for when a CPL holder forgets to renew his or her license (including if the clerk's office doesn't have an updated address to send a reminder to) and continues carrying a concealed pistol on his or her person or in his or her vehicle. Currently, even carrying the day after a license expires can result in a five-year prison sentence. As a convicted felon, the person would then lose his or her right to possess any firearm for the rest of his or her life. This means that an otherwise law-abiding citizen could never hunt again or be able to have a gun in the home or carry one for personal protection. A conviction also could result in loss of employment or housing and difficulties finding either in the future. For noncitizens who have legal residency, being convicted of a criminal offense can be grounds for deportation. Proponents of the bill argue that this punishment is too steep for individuals who are eligible to renew a CPL yet miss a deadline, and that the penalties should be scaled to better fit the circumstances they are intended to address.

Proponents also say that prosecutorial discretion regarding how to charge a violation has created a patchwork of penalties across the state, as both the level of enforcement and decisions on how to treat a violation vary from region to region and county to county. In addition to creating more reasonable penalties for the situation addressed, the bill would establish greater consistency in applying those penalties to all citizens of the state.

Against:

Critics of the bill argue that carrying a concealed pistol should not be taken lightly and that CPL holders should be held to a higher level of responsibility. The one-year period, coupled with immunity from even the civil fine if the license is renewed within 60 business days of the violation, means that a person could go for over fourteen months without a valid license.

Although the felony penalty may be excessive when the intent is not to break the law, the solution offered by the bill seems too lenient in light of the seriousness of carrying a deadly weapon in public.

POSITIONS:

A representative of Michigan Open Carry testified in support of the bill. (5-18-21)

The Michigan Coalition for Responsible Gun Owners indicated support for the bill. (6-8-21)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.