

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1259

As Reported By House Committee On:
Judiciary

Title: An act relating to forfeiture of firearms.

Brief Description: Allowing for the destruction of forfeited firearms.

Sponsors: Representatives Locke, Appelwick, J. Kohl, Wang, Reams, Veloria, Johanson, L. Johnson, Flemming and Pruitt.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Judiciary, March 3, 1993, DPS.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Appelwick, Chair; Ludwig, Vice Chair; Ballasiotes, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Johanson; Locke; H. Myers; Riley; Schmidt; Scott; and Wineberry.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Padden, Ranking Minority Member; Campbell; Chappell; Forner; Long; Mastin; and Tate.

Staff: Margaret Allen (786-7191).

Background: Firearms possessed or used in certain illegal ways may be seized by a law enforcement agency and ordered forfeited by a court.

When firearms are forfeited, firearms illegal for any person to possess are to be destroyed if a court so orders. A maximum of 10 percent of forfeited firearms may be retained by a law enforcement agency for agency use. The remaining forfeited firearms, along with firearms no longer needed by the law enforcement agency, are to be auctioned to commercial sellers once a year if an agency has accumulated at least 10 firearms authorized for sale. For efficiency, law enforcement agencies may conduct joint auctions.

After the law enforcement agency's costs, including actual costs of storage and sale, are deducted, the auction

proceeds are forwarded to the Department of Wildlife for use in its Hunter Safety Program.

The public auctioning agency must maintain records of all forfeited firearms by manufacturer, model, caliber, serial number, date, and circumstances of forfeiture, and final disposition.

Some law enforcement agencies have declined to auction forfeited firearms.

Summary of Substitute Bill: By midnight, June 30, 1993, each law enforcement agency must prepare an inventory of all firearms in the agency's possession that have been, or may be, forfeited, or that are no longer needed for evidence.

The law enforcement agency must destroy every illegal firearm in the inventory and may retain 10 percent of the legal firearms for agency use. Of the remaining firearms in the inventory, the law enforcement agency must either:

- (1) Comply with the auction provisions of the statute in effect immediately preceding the effective date of the act; or
- (2) Trade or auction the firearms. Net auction proceeds must be forwarded to the firearms range account. Further, for every short firearm the law enforcement agency neither trades nor auctions, the agency must pay a \$25 fee to the state treasurer, to a maximum of \$50,000. The state treasurer is to credit the fees to the firearms range account.

Regarding firearms coming into a law enforcement agency's possession after June 30, 1993, a legislative authority may dispose of forfeited firearms or firearms no longer needed for evidence in any manner it chooses. The legislative authority may keep the proceeds of an auction or trade.

Antique firearms, curios, relics, and firearms of particular historical significance must be auctioned or traded to commercial sellers.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The options of destroying or trading firearms apply only to firearms coming into the possession of a law enforcement agency after June 30, 1993. The decision of how to dispose of firearms rests with the legislative authority rather than with the law enforcement agency.

By midnight, June 30, 1993, a law enforcement agency must inventory all firearms in its possession that have been, or

may be, forfeited, or that are no longer needed for evidence. Firearms in the inventory must be either auctioned or traded. A law enforcement agency must pay a \$25 fee for every handgun in the inventory that is neither traded nor auctioned, to a maximum of \$50,000. Net auction proceeds and the fees are to go to the firearms range account, rather than to the Department of Wildlife for use in its Firearms Training Program.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Too many guns are in circulation. Violence caused by guns is escalating nationwide. Local governments should have the option of destroying or auctioning firearms. This is not a fiscal issue; it is a law enforcement issue.

Testimony Against: Firearms manufacturers would be the main beneficiaries of a law allowing forfeited firearms to be destroyed. To destroy forfeited firearms would be to destroy a valuable source of governmental revenue. A local option to allow a law enforcement agency to trade forfeited firearms for police equipment is preferable. A different split of proceeds would encourage auctions.

Witnesses: Denise Harnly, Seattle Neighborhood Group (for); Greg Mykland, city of Tacoma (for); Philip Indovina (against); Colonel Mel Pfankuche (against); Donald Roberts (against); Al Woodbridge, Washington State Rifle and Pistol Association (against); George Aiton, Washington Arms Collectors (against); Bill Henry (against); George Minnich, King County Police (against); and Rick Jensen, Washington State Patrol (neutral).