



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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*Testimony of Rep. Bill Bridgeo in support of*  
**LD 1743, An Act to Allow Municipalities to Prohibit Firearms  
Within Their Municipal Buildings and Voting Places and at Their  
Municipal Public Proceedings**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary*

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Bill Bridgeo, and I represent House District 60, which is part of Augusta. I am here today to testify in support of **LD 1743, An Act to Allow Municipalities to Prohibit Firearms Within Their Municipal Buildings and Voting Places and at Their Municipal Public Proceedings**.

Prior to my election to the House three years ago, I served for forty years as a city manager in three communities – the last twenty-four in Augusta. During those years, I witnessed any number of instances where I wished that the municipality had the ability to limit the presence of firearms in a particular meeting setting or forum. Perhaps the scariest was here in Augusta a while back when a very clearly mentally disturbed young man – whose posts on social media made clear that he was an ardent open-carry champion who was angry at the world in general and the city in particular – became a regular fixture at city council meetings.

The combination of deluded statements and a Glock 9 mm on his hip were something, I assure you, that you'd not want to be present for.

My mayor, councilors (among them current Representative Dave Rollins), city employees and members of the public desperately wanted the police chief and I to do something about it and we tried. The chief began posting officers at our meetings – a significant overtime expense. The Mayor at the time also happened to be the Deputy Attorney General in charge of the Criminal Division. At his suggestion, I posted a notice at the entrances to City Hall – using the same language employed by the state court system – prohibiting firearms. Within days, I was contacted by the General Counsel of the National Rifle Association (NRA) threatening court action if I did not remove the postings. The AG's Office, upon reconsideration, agreed with the NRA's opinion that, absent a specific state statute, my actions were not legally allowed.

So, we essentially lived with the situation (including me meeting one on one with the individual on several occasions to discuss his issues more privately and avoid his presence in the Council Chambers). Eventually, he lost interest and started appearing at the Legislature – where, of course, he was not permitted to have his gun on him.

In all my years in public service, that was the most nerve-wracking time that I ever went through – but by no means the only one. Local government forums – be it town council, planning board, zoning appeals meetings or whatever – can be places of intensely passionate argument and deeply conflicting feelings. In recent years, polling places – including Augusta - have seen teams of young men with assault rifles strapped across their chests positioning themselves near the entrances to the polls for God knows what reasons.

About the same time as the Augusta City Council was going through what I described above, a tragic mass killing took place in the City Council Chambers of Kirkwood, Missouri. There, an angry local contractor, upset over the issuance or denial of a building permit (I forget which) shot and killed a police officer, the mayor, two council members and others. That tragedy (which admittedly would not have been prevented by a local ordinance prohibiting firearms in the building during council meetings) was fresh in the minds of public officials in Augusta and added to the tension.

LD 1743 is a common sense public safety measure. It is also not a mandate – merely a measure that allows a community – using its power of local control – to make an informed decision about whether or not to impose prudent limits on firearms in public places where passions and tensions can run high. Local community leaders are in the best position to assess these circumstances just as the State already does in its varied venues.

I know that this concept has been considered by past legislatures and that it will generate some heat, but I believe that it is an important and timely measure that balances Second Amendment concerns against public safety concerns.

I thank you for your consideration and I'm happy to answer any questions.