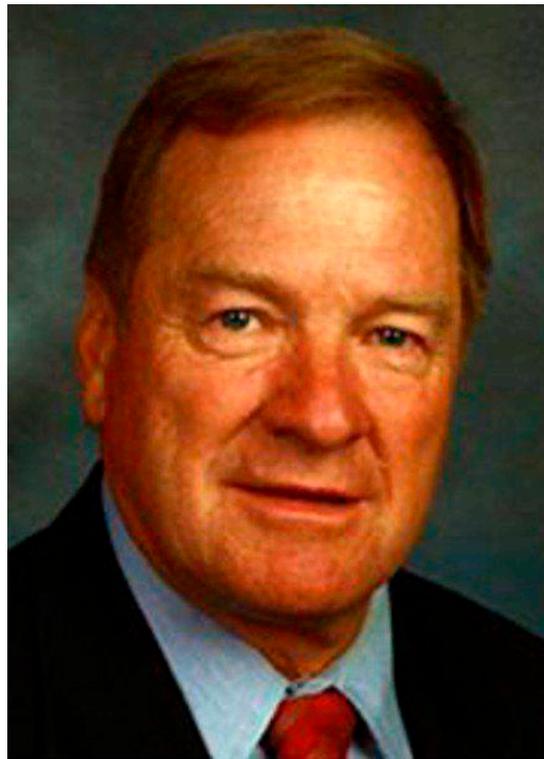


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Beitzel to introduce gun safety bill

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Wendell R. Beitzel



CUMBERLAND — Del. Wendell R. Beitzel (R-Garrett, Allegany) announced Thursday that he would submit a smart gun safety bill as part of the House Minority Caucus' legislative package this session.

The bill is aimed at protecting responsible gun owners and deterring criminals from stealing firearms for violent purposes by establishing the theft of a firearm as a separate felony offense that would stack with other transgressions.

Also included in the caucus' legislation is a bill requiring state and local correction facilities to cooperate with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainers for those who have previously committed violent crimes, and legislation that seeks to improve transparency throughout the judicial system, including more specific reporting of and increasing victim input on plea deals and allowing media to film and show the public sentencing portion of criminal procedures.

In the law's current iteration, said Beitzel, when a gun was stolen "it had to be over a certain value to be considered a felony" otherwise "people that steal a gun it's only a misdemeanor. What the bill does is say 'steal any firearm, it's a felony.'

"Not only would it hopefully deter them from stealing a gun, it would deter them from using the gun to commit a crime," Beitzel said. "Our Second Amendment rights are constitutional that we enjoy. It's not the law-abiding, gun-owning citizens that are the problem."

Should the bill pass, a first offense would carry a two-year minimum, five-year maximum sentence and a \$1,000 maximum fine; subsequent offenses carry a five-year minimum, 10-year maximum sentence and a \$2,500 maximum fine.

Current law incorporates guns under the general theft statute, which is usually a misdemeanor offense with penalties based on the item's monetary value. Maryland law already prevents convicted felons from possessing or purchasing a firearm; Beitzel's bill would prevent people who have stolen a firearm from attempting to own one again.

All firearms, including handguns and long guns, are covered in the provisions. Antique weapons, another frequent target for criminals, are too protected.

Beitzel introduced the bill in the previous two legislative sessions, but both times it was defeated in the Judiciary Committee.

Beitzel believes the legislation is a smart approach to preserve lawful gun ownership, as increased penalties should further dissuade criminals from attempting to obtain firearms illegally.

He hopes for bipartisan support. Both parties agree, with the recent spikes in violent crime throughout the state that have alarmed legislators, that public safety legislation is needed to manage the outbreak.

This bill does not punish lawful gun owners, unlike some other legislation, Beitzel said. Instead, it defends their property while making it less likely that violent criminals can get their hands on a gun.

The bill will be read in the House of Delegates and assigned to a committee in the coming weeks.

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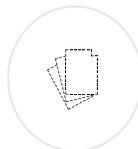


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