

Texas ‘constitutional carry’ proposal for handguns has new momentum in state Senate

With little fanfare, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick creates a new panel that will hear bill to let Texans carry handguns without a license.



The Texas Capitol in Austin on Wednesday, March 17, 2021. (Juan Figueroa/ The Dallas Morning News) (Juan Figueroa)

Updated at 12:35 p.m. to include comment from Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick’s office.

AUSTIN — Amid mounting pressure from conservative Republicans, a proposal to let people carry handguns without a license is advancing in the Texas Senate, just days after Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick [suggested its prospects](#) were poor.

A [new Senate committee](#), quietly formed Friday and stacked with Republicans who favor permitless carry, will have a hearing on the proposal next week, according to its new chairman.

“I am proud to chair the newly created Senate Committee on Constitutional Issues and look forward to hearing this bill next week so we can pass #ConstitutionalCarry this session!” Sen. Charles Schwertner, R-Georgetown, [tweeted Friday](#).

Patrick’s senior advisor, Sherry Sylvester, said Friday there are still not enough votes in the Senate to pass a permitless carry bill.

“Today, Lt. Gov. Patrick established some additional options to move a bill forward,” she said in a statement, without elaborating. “He will continue meeting with law enforcement, gun rights stakeholders and Senators on this issue to find consensus and the votes needed to pass.”

I am proud to chair the newly created Senate Committee on Constitutional Issues and look forward to hearing this bill next week so we can pass [#ConstitutionalCarry](#) this session! [#txlege](#) pic.twitter.com/Vo52auMrOP

— Charles Schwertner (@DrSchwertner) [April 23, 2021](#)

After years of going nowhere, the divisive policy passed the Texas House last week, [with just one Republican voting against and seven Democrats in support](#). Under House Bill 1927, people 21 and older who can legally have a handgun could carry it publicly without first passing the safety course and background check required now.

On Monday, Patrick [suggested the votes weren't there to pass the bill](#) in the GOP-led Senate, triggering pushback from the party's conservative flank.

Since then, several Republican senators publicly announced support for “constitutional carry,” as it is known among backers, who say the government shouldn't block people's right to bear arms.

Several of them, including Lakeway [Sen. Dawn Buckingham](#), Edgewood [Sen. Bob Hall](#) and Conroe [Sen. Brandon Creighton](#), are on the new Special Committee on Constitutional Issues that is set to take up House Bill 1927 next week.

Republicans hold a 18-13 majority in the chamber. It's not clear which members may oppose the permitless carry.

Patrick has not answered questions about whether he supports permitless carry. Earlier this week, Gov. Greg Abbott [ducked taking a position](#), telling reporters that he and his office are “looking at all of these bills as they are working their way through the Capitol.”

I support HB1927. We must pass constitutional carry this session! We have no excuse for not delivering this GOP priority to the governors desk. [#txlege](#)

— Senator Bob Hall (@SenatorBobHall) [April 21, 2021](#)

Meanwhile, lobbying is intensifying against the bill as faith leaders this week joined a growing list of opponents, which already includes members of [law enforcement and some firearm instructors](#).

“With every right we have comes corresponding responsibilities and the background checks and the safety measures help with that,” said Bishop Gregory Kelly of the Catholic Diocese of Dallas, one of several faith leaders to speak at a press conference Wednesday sponsored by the Network of Texas IAF Organizations. “My dad was a gun owner, he taught me how to shoot a gun when I was a kid ... I don't see how not having that in place makes us safer.”

Patrick, who presides over the Senate, said Monday he planned to meet with members of law enforcement in opposition of the bill and gun rights groups in favor “to see if we can find a path that a majority of senators will vote to pass.” It is not clear where those efforts have led.

On Thursday, Schwertner filed a new permitless carry bill, Senate Bill 2224. It offers some differences from the House version, such as letting only Texas residents carry without a license. That bill was referred to the chamber’s administration committee, which Schwertner chairs.

[Allie Morris](#), Austin Bureau Correspondent . Allie has covered Texas politics for two years and written about everything from tax policy to child protection. She previously worked for the San Antonio Express-News and in New Hampshire, as the statehouse reporter for the Concord Monitor.

allie.morris@dallasnews.com [@MorrisReports](#)