

**TESTIMONY OF
KIM STOLFER**



**2nd VICE-PRESIDENT
CHAIRMAN
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE
ALLEGHENY COUNTY
SPORTSMEN'S LEAGUE**



**VICE-CHAIRMAN
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE
PA SPORTSMEN'S ASSOC**

**PUBLIC HEARING BEFORE
THE PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE
GAME and FISHERIES COMMITTEE
ON**

Hunting with Semi-Automatic Weapons

June 15, 2015

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Game and Fisheries Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today.

Regardless of what you think, or how traditionalists and the public feel, about using semi-automatic guns for hunting, autoloaders and AR-style (modern style) rifles are becoming more and more accepted in hunting camps in all but one state in the country. Here in Pennsylvania, on page 18 of the Hunting Digest, hunters are greeted with this statement;

Firearms & Devices – Unlawful to Use

It is unlawful to hunt with 1) Automatic and semi-automatic (autoloading) rifles and handguns; 2) air- or gas-operated rifles and handguns.

We, Pennsylvania, are the ‘only’ state in the nation to have this general prohibition. The ONLY one! Yet, virtually every major firearm manufacturer is producing these guns in suitable calibers powerful enough for deer, hogs and bears.

In every hunting camp, someone will invariably begin extolling the virtues of his personal choice in big game rifles where it’s sure to start an animated discussion. While there are several action types in common use today, two of them — the bolt action and semi-automatic rifles — comprise the vast majority of rifle actions that hunters carry into the field, except here in PA.

Modern rifle selection for today’s hunter for all practical purposes will really boil down to just two things — the shooter’s style of hunting and the game he intends to hunt.

Currently, in Pennsylvania, we allow semi-automatic shotguns to be used for hunting small game, migratory birds, turkey and deer in special regulation areas (ammunition specific), without incident.

Other than that, the debate really is moot and boils down to whether or not Pennsylvania is going to cast off the vestiges of 19th century prejudice and embrace an accepted and worthwhile technology.

Technology:

All modern rifles (single shot, lever, bolt and semi-auto) had their beginnings as military weapons. As with all military weapons, warriors became familiar with and respected them, and then adapted them for hunting use upon returning home. The bolt action is the older action style and traditionalists bring many good arguments in favor of the turn-bolt gun to the debate. The first successful design for a semi-automatic rifle is attributed to German-born gunsmith Ferdinand Ritter von Mannlicher, who unveiled the design in 1885. In 1906, Remington Arms introduced the "Remington Auto-loading Repeating Rifle." Remington advertised this rifle, renamed the "Model 8" in 1911, as a sporting rifle. The rifle was offered in .25, .30, .32, and .35 caliber models, and gained popularity among civilians as well as some law enforcement officials who appreciated the combination of a semi-automatic action and relatively powerful rifle cartridges.

Many arguments that once favored bolt actions have fallen by the wayside as modern technology continued to incrementally overcome the semi-automatic rifle’s original shortcomings. Two styles of semi-automatic rifles are typically used for hunting. The first is the traditional-style hunting rifle and the other is one with a military lineage, including the AR-15 style rifle.

These rifles are reliable; after all, we equip our troops with the selective-fire, military versions, past and present, of some of these modern style rifles. They also can be extremely accurate, as they have proved, and continue to prove, again and again in various shooting competitions throughout the world. Once hunters get past the aesthetics, cosmetics and untruths surrounding the guns, they discover that semi-automatic rifles are wonderful firearms for hunting offering a plethora of advantages.

It is important to note that semi-automatic guns are those which fire the round in the chamber, extract it, eject it, and load a new round into the chamber (if one is available in the magazine) and then require a separate pull of the trigger for each shot. Semi-autos will cock the gun at the same time, in preparation for the next shot.

There is very little practical difference in 'rate of fire' between a PA legal pump action rifle, such as a Remington 760/7600, and the average semi-automatic rifle, such as a Remington 740/7400.

States & Game Code Controls:

In the accompanying chart, it is readily demonstrated that 49 of the 50 states in this nation accept the use of semiautomatic firearms for hunting. In a super majority of these states there isn't even a magazine limitation in place. Of the 14 states that do have magazine limitations on ammunition capacity most of those are the result of gun control statutes that already limit magazine capacity for all citizens and not one of specific game code regulation.

Further, it is interesting to note that of the states with magazine limitations on ammunition capacity most do not require that magazines be permanently altered, when one is in the field, to that limitation of ammunition capacity. This places a trust and honor system upon hunters to act appropriately in the field.

Many states also allow for the use of semiautomatic pistols, ammunition limitations apply, for the hunting and harvesting of game depending on the species as well. This is another important point since a semiautomatic handgun and revolver have, for all intents and purposes, the same rate of fire until their ammunition is expended.

Practicality and Use:

There are many advantages to the use of a semiautomatic firearm that is a plus for getting more individuals to feel comfortable about getting involved in hunting. One of the big downsides to a bolt-action rifle when compared to a semi-automatic rifle is felt recoil, especially for new shooters who have a smaller stature. Larger calibers, from some favorite deer calibers such as the .30-06 on up, generate significant recoil that the average shooter may not tolerate well. Gas-operated semi-autos attenuate this recoil and soften the blow to one's shoulder.

Another plus favoring semi-auto's is faster reloading for follow-up shots. All things being equal, firing a shot in Penn's woods requires a good bit of luck because the prevalent brush can easily disturb the flight of a well-aimed bullet resulting in wounded game. With a bolt action rifle or a lever action rifle one must disturb the site picture so that the action can be operated to reload which takes precious seconds away from a follow-up shot to humanely put down wounded game. The action on a semiautomatic firearm does not require one to lift one's eyesight away from the sights thus minimizing the likelihood that wounded game will be allowed to get away. When we combine less recoil, the

minimizing of muzzle jump, faster loading and getting the sights or crosshairs on target for a second or third shot the semi-auto is hands-down the winner over the bolt action.

Another advantage, on the plus side for modern sporting rifles, is their straight stock designs and muzzle brakes. These features help to attenuate muzzle jump and recoil for even faster follow up shots than the traditional semi-autos like the Model 740. Another feature is that semiautomatic military style firearms are easily adapted to the use of silencers, which can be an important safety tool (i.e. protection of hearing) as well as a respectful way to hunt without disturbing people unnecessarily.

The removable box magazine is a notable convenience as well as a significant safety item. If you are doing a lot of getting in and out of vehicles, such as when calling predators, it makes loading and unloading the rifle simple. For the big-game hunter, an extra loaded magazine in a pocket provides a fast reload. Where it's legal, the ability to use a higher-capacity magazine can be helpful.

The pistol grip design is another advantage for some hunting situations. For example, when calling predators it is a smart policy to keep the rifle up and ready. The pistol grip puts the hand in a more natural position and reduces hand fatigue. It may sound trivial here, but after a long day of coyote hunting it is anything but trivial to manage and limit fatigue. The pistol grip also provides a handle for an alternative way to carry a shorter-barreled rifle with the muzzle down.

Semiautomatic rifles with a military lineage also provide the option of quickly switching scopes and, in many cases, for shifting to iron sights as an option. More than once I have seen a hunt ruined by a damaged scope. It takes less than a minute, in many cases, to switch to iron sights or another pre-zeroed scope and one is back in the hunt.

The ergonomics of military style semiautomatic firearms is another feature that benefits those of smaller stature and children by, in many cases, having an option for an adjustable buttstock that is a common option on many modern military style rifles. If a hunter has short arms and thick shoulders and heavy clothes to insulate one from the cold it can be difficult to shoot a firearm with a full-length stock.

Safety:

The discussions over the years have invariably led to a belief that allowing the use of semiautomatic firearms, in a general sense, to be used in Pennsylvania for hunting would lead to a less safe environment. In the attached chart it is clear that the hunting accident rate in the vast majority of states is less than Pennsylvania, and overall there is no correlation possible to indicate a connection between semiautomatic firearms in the accident rate afield. Moreover, these hunting accidents are not all firearms related as they include individuals falling out of trees and tree stands and other non-firearm related incidents.

What is rarely discussed is the importance that a semiautomatic firearm presents when confronted by a dangerous situation in the woods if an individual is attacked by predators. While the likelihood of this occurring may be small, that does not diminish the importance of an individual having the latitude to make the decision that they would like to have a semiautomatic firearm as an option in these scenarios. Unfortunately, up to this point, Pennsylvania hunters are denied that life-saving option.

We consider safety an essential element for all outdoor activities, and that is one of the areas where semiautomatic firearms shine as well since unloading a firearm is made easier and more predictable by

the ability to remove a detachable magazine and open the action of the firearm to verify that the chamber is empty, without having to cycle the bolt repeatedly to remove ammunition as is necessary in a bolt action rifle and lever action rifles. Also, semiautomatic firearms with the military lineage have a much more robust and definitive safety built into the trigger group, which provides for a greater degree of confidence in the mechanical action of the firearm.

Closing Remarks:

There is no merit to avoid taking action on this important change! While there are two bills before us, HB 366 (49 co-sponsors) and HB 223 (21 co-sponsors), we believe the best, and most appropriate, choice is HB 366 and recommend that you, Mr. Chairman, and this committee support that legislation and move it to the floor for a vote!

It is long past due for Pennsylvania to join the community of states that recognize freedom of choice on behalf of the hunting community and cast off the mindset of bureaucratic prohibition, and prejudice, of an era long gone! In 2006, the legislature approved the lawful carrying of self-defense firearms, by hunters in the field, despite decades of bureaucratic mistrust. We believe embracing new technology is a furtherance of that common sense approach.

On behalf of the organizations I represent, I thank you, Mr. Chairman and the committee members, for the opportunity to testify here today.

*The **Allegheny County Sportsmen's League** is a non-profit educational organization representing 45 sportsmen clubs, and is the voice of over 100,000 sportsmen in and around Allegheny County. Founded in 1921 the ACSL is dedicated to the preservation of our natural wildlife resources through hunting and fishing. The ACSL also teams with other pro-gun organization and works to preserve the fundamental Constitutional Right to Keep and Bear Arms as protected under Article 1, Section 21 of the Pennsylvania Constitution's "Declaration of Rights" and the Second Amendment of the U. S. Constitution.*

2015 US Firearm Hunting Regs & 2013 Hunting Incidents

State	Jurisdiction	Mandatory				Type of Firearm						Licenses			# of Hunters			# Hunting Incidents		Rate
		Hunter Ed	Training Began	Basic Hunter Ed	Bowhunter Ed	Trapper Ed	Other	Semi-Autos Allowed	Magazine Limits	Magazine Capacity	Rifles	Shotguns	Pistols/Handguns	Apprentice License	HE Proof to buy Licenses	USFWS IFAMS paid license holders (fws.gov)	2013 Fatal Hunting Incidents	2013 Non Fatal Incidents	Hunting Accident Percentage %	
Alabama		1973		X			X	N	X	X	X	X	X	X	530,127	5	25	0.0056		
Alaska		1973		X	X		X	N	X	X	X	X	X	X	101,547	UNK	UNK	.0031		
Arizona		1955		X		X		N	X	X	X	X	X	X	195,664	2	4	.0023		
Arkansas		1971		X		X		N	X	X	X	X	X	X	390,554	-	9	.0043		
California		1954		X		X		N	X	X	X	X	X	X	281,472	3	9	.0028		
Colorado		1970		X		X		Y	6	X	X	X	X	X	286,363	2	6	.0023		
Connecticut		1957		X	X	X		Y	10	X	X	X	X	X	44,178	-	1	.0054		
Delaware		1970		X		X	X	N		#	X	X	X	X	18,184	-	1	.0057		
Florida		1957		X		X		Y	5	X	X	X	X	X	176,616	3	7	.0044		
Georgia		1971		X		X		N		X	X	X	X	X	363,575	1	15	0		
Hawaii		1978		X		X		N		X	X	X	X	X	9,812	-	-	.0004		
Idaho		1950		X	X	X		N		X	X	X	X	X	248,728	-	1	.0031		
Illinois		1959		X		X		N		#	X	X	X	X	321,739	-	10	.0040		
Indiana		1974		X		X		N		X	X	X	X	X	273,929	-	11	.0075		
Iowa		1960		X		X		N		#	X	X	X	X	227,408	-	17	.0031		
Kansas		1973		X		X	X	N		X	X	X	X	X	226,553	-	7	.0039		
Kentucky		1944		X	X	X		Y	10	X	X	X	X	X	330,238	3	10	.0041		
Louisiana		1973		X		X		N		X	X	X	X	X	345,525	2	12	.0021		
Maine		1957		X	X	X	X	Y	6	X	X	X	X	X	189,120	-	4	0		
Maryland		1966		X	X	X		Y	8	X	X	X	X	X	116,754	-	-	UNK		
Massachusetts		1954		X		X	X	N		#	X	X	X	X	57,641	-	UNK	.0012		
Michigan		1946		X		X		Y	6	X	X	X	X	X	761,269	1	8	.0031		
Minnesota		1955		X		X		N		X	X	X	X	X	579,910	1	17	.0118		
Mississippi		1972		X		X		N		X	X	X	X	X	220,266	2	24	.0031		
Missouri		1957		X		X		Y	11	X	X	X	X	X	486,608	1	14	.0021		
Montana		1957		X	X	X		N		X	X	X	X	X	235,621	-	5	.0051		
Nebraska		1974		X	X	X		Y	6	X	X	X	X	X	177,623	1	8	0		
Nevada		1973		X		X		N		X	X	X	X	X	64,334	-	-	.0084		
New Hampshire		1963		X	X	X	X	Y	5	X	X	X	X	X	59,301	-	5	.0039		
New Jersey		1954		X	X	X		Y	3	#	X	X	X	X	77,607	-	3	.0020		
New Mexico		1965		X		X		N		X	X	X	X	X	97,893	-	2			

State	Hunter Ed Training Began	Basic Hunter Ed	Bowhunter Ed	Trapper Ed	Other	Semi-Autos Allowed						Pistols/Handguns	Apprentice License	HE Proof to buy Licenses	USFWS IFAMS paid license holders (fws.gov)	2013 Fatal Hunting Incidents	2013 Non Fatal Incidents	Hunting Accident Percentage %
						Magazine Limits	Magazine Capacity	Rifles	Shotguns	Pistols/Handguns	Magazine Limits							
New York	1944	X	X	X		X	Y	6	X	X	X	X	X	581,401	2	17	.0033	
North Carolina	1971	X				X	N		X	X	X	X	521,717	1	16	.0033		
North Dakota	1972	X				X	N		X	X	X	X	156,052	-	8	.0051		
Ohio	1956	X	X	X		X	Y	3	#	X	X	X	405,866	5	17	.0054		
Oklahoma	1956	X				X	Y	7	X	X	X	X	381,049	2	10	.0032		
Oregon	1958	X	X	X		X	Y	5	X	X	X	X	260,949	1	2	.0011		
Pennsylvania**	1959	X				**	N		**	**	**	X	968,735	2	25	.0028		
Rhode Island	1956	X	X			X	Y	5	#	X	X	X	8,605	-	-	0		
South Carolina	1974	X				X	N		X	X	X	X	173,942	3	15	.010		
South Dakota	1956	X	X			X	Y	6	X	X	X	X	253,512	-	19	.0075		
Tennessee	1972	X				X	N		X	X	X	X	530,547	1	16	.0032		
Texas	1972	X				X	N		X	X	X	X	1,036,946	3	34	.0036		
Utah	1957	X		X		X	N		X	X	X	X	205,153	-	4	.0019		
Vermont	1959	X	X	X		X	Y	6	X	X	X	X	80,650	-	6	.0074		
Virginia	1961	X				X	N		X	X	X	X	300,764	3	37	.0132		
Washington	1957	X		X		X	N		X	X	X	X	188,081	2	3	.0027		
West Virginia	1957	X	X			X	N		X	X	X	X	221,806	-	13	.0059		
Wisconsin	1967	X				X	N		X	X	X	X	704,357	1	26	.0038		
Wyoming	1967	X				X	N		X	X	X	X	143,155	-	3	.0021		
TOTAL		50	15	13	4							34	38	14,619,449	53	506	.0038	

** Notes NO hunting with semi-auto RIFLES or Handguns/Hunting with semi-auto Shotguns Special Regs Areas & Migratory Birds ONLY!
NO Rifles for Deer These states do NOT allow 'Rifle' hunting for deer in either centerfire or rimfire configurations.
Ohio # No Bottle Necked Cartridges for Deer (straight wall cases only)