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N.J. police union sues to make it easier for retired cops to carry concealed guns

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A New Jersey police union is suing state officials over restrictions on when retired cops can carry concealed guns.

In a lawsuit filed Monday, the state's Fraternal Order of Police argued that requiring former officers to apply for local permits violates their "national right ... to carry concealed firearms anywhere in the United States, including New Jersey."

The complaint is the latest attempt by gun rights advocates to push back against New Jersey gun laws, which are some of the toughest in the nation. The fight has become especially pronounced during the coronavirus shutdown, and a local firearms club recently sued the state to re-open gun ranges.

Federal law allows "a qualified law enforcement officer," which includes retired cops, to carry concealed firearms. That proposal passed in 2004 and has since been amended.

New Jersey law agrees that former officers may carry, but they must jump through additional hoops, from application fees to receiving approval from the head of the State Police.

New Jersey should do away with those permits, the complaint says. The state should also stop any prosecutions of anyone who violated New Jersey's requirements and reimburse attorney fees.

The lawsuit is directed at state Attorney General Gurbir Grewal and acting State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan. A Grewal spokesman declined comment, and the State Police did not respond to a request for comment.

In the complaint, three residents said they were hurt by New Jersey's limitations.

One is former Secret Service officer Richard Bowen, according to the lawsuit. Bowen is in his 70s, and New Jersey law won't allow him to carry a concealed weapon once he's older than 75. That violates his rights under federal law, the suit said.

The complaint was filed in U.S. District Court for New Jersey along with the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association.