

# Tennessee allows carrying of handgun without permit

BY MIKAELA PYATTE

In July of 2021, Tennessee passed a law allowing for “permitless” or “constitutional” carrying of handguns in the state. Tennessee permits a large majority of citizens to carry a loaded handgun on their person, openly or concealed, without a permit. It has joined 11 other states who have similar laws.

The law does not affect the carrying of rifles or shotguns, only handguns. Historically, a handgun carry permit was required to possess a loaded handgun in public, but now those persons who meet a specific set of requirements can carry a handgun.

Individuals have to be 21 years old or older, legally own the handgun, and be in a place where they are lawfully allowed to be present. The current law does not require that citizens complete a safety or training course.

Tennessee has always been known for its pro-gun stance, and the state’s handgun laws have been under intense scrutiny in recent years. While some praise the state for its pro-Second Amendment stance, others believe the laws are too lax, and stricter measures need to be taken to prevent gun violence.

John Crawford is a State Representative from the first district of Tennessee. He is in favor of the current law.

“It’s a constitutional issue,” he said. “In our Constitution, it gives us the right to bear arms. I think every citizen has the right. Now, you can lose that right if you don’t act properly, but every citizen has the right to be able to bear arms.”

Joshua Burton, a seventh grade student, agreed.

“Now people can protect themselves,” he said. “I know there might be more crimes but people can help stop them.”

Karen Camper is a State Representative from house district 87 and currently serves as Tennessee House Minority Leader. She has



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**OPEN CARRY.** Tennessee is one of 11 states across the nation that allows citizens to carry a loaded handgun in public without a permit. While some strongly support the law, others disagree.

a very different view of the law.

“I think when you look at the current environment that we’re in, it’s a heightened sense of intolerance, this heightened sense of violence, and this heightened sense of school shootings that this is only adding to it versus trying to deal with the problems that we’re currently dealing with,” she said. “What happened as a result of having this bill passed is a lot of people are breaking into cars, stealing people’s weapons.”

Seventh grade student Kaelynn Lane agreed.

“People should have to renew their permits every 2 years and need to be at least 30 years old and need to pass a drug test,” she said.

Governor Bill Lee released a statement in April of 2021 in favor of the law.

“I signed constitutional carry today because it shouldn’t be hard for law-abiding Tennesseans to exercise their second amendment rights,” he said in the statement.

Crawford said that he thinks the governor did the right thing.

“It is something that has been worked on for many years,” he said. “That was the best decision

that could be made, not only for our armed citizens in the state of Tennessee, but for the protection of all Tennesseans.”

Not everybody is so supportive of the law, however.

“I think that there are rules and regulations about pretty much everything we do, even with our constitutional right to do it,” Camper said. “In this case, I don’t think it’s a restriction. It’s just rules around this right. So much has changed since the Constitution was written; it is a living document. So even with your first amendment, there are rules and regulations.”

The Tennessee Bureau of Investigations, the Tennessee Sheriff’s Association and the Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police all have criticized the new constitutional carry law.

“I definitely take what our sheriffs and everyone says very, very seriously,” Crawford said. “It goes back to the constitutional issue for me that every citizen has that right.”

Crawford said that he would look at everything that law enforcement had concerns about to make sure that “we are doing the

right thing”.

Burton agreed.

“I understand where they would be having concerns about the new law because they don’t want to be trying to make an arrest on someone and then have a gun pulled on them,” he said.

The lack of safety training, in particular, is a concern for many opponents of the law.

“We need to have safety training, just how to take care of a weapon, how to lock the weapon up, how to properly store the weapon, how to fire a weapon, and even how to just hold the weapon,” Camper said.

Seventh grade student Akira Gamble agreed.

“Someone that wants to carry a gun should learn all the gun laws and be trained to use it properly,” she said. “People would be safer with training.”

A new proposal now would lower the age to carry a handgun from 21 to 18 years old.

“It is the age of adulthood, it’s when you become responsible for your own self in a lot of things,” Crawford said. “They can join the military and go fight and bleed for our country, so there’s no reason

they shouldn’t be able to carry a weapon at the same age.”

According to Crawford, the right to bear arms is important.

“It’s in the Constitution and that’s what we govern ourselves by,” he said. “That’s what this country was founded on.”

Seventh grade student Akira Gamble is worried about the proposal to drop the age down to 18 years.

“This would be a bad idea to lower the gun age to 18 years old because people are still young and may not be making the best decisions,” she said. “More people are going to have weapons and not everyone has the best intentions.”

Lane is worried about violence in schools and how this law could impact that problem.

“I am worried about more school violence and school shootings because of the new law,” she said. “There are mentally ill people out there and the government is just giving people the things to cause this to happen.”

Camper believes education is key to prevent gun violence.

“I think parents have to have a conversation with their children about gun violence,” Camper said. “A lot of families, particularly like rural Tennessee, have children come up hunting and handling weapons, but they don’t let them do it without training.”

Although Crawford supports “constitutional carry,” he is worried about school violence, too.

“That is a big concern, not only for Tennesseans, but for our whole country,” he said. “Our kids are our future and we should do anything we can to provide protection for you guys to allow you all to get the education that you need [...] Whether that’s secure doors, whether that’s not allowing firearms on your property, whatever those factors are that the locals decide is the best use for them, then I think it’s our responsibility to allow the citizens to make that decision and make sure we provide the security to make sure that happens.”

## Kids Business Expo teaches students about operating a business

BY SYDNEY GENTRY

The Kids Business Expo is an event created to let kids imagine what it is like to own a business. Middle School students have the ability to sell their own items and keep the cash.

This experience can help kids learn to earn money, learn how to use the money they earned and create their own business. Several Sevier Middle students participated in the Expo this year.

Lora Barnett was the organizer of the event, which took place in February. She’s part of Kingsport Chamber of Commerce, where she works as the Director of Government Relations and Workforce Development.

“The best way to describe it

is a ‘Science Fair for Entrepreneurs,’” she said. “If a student has ever thought about creating a product to sell, this is the event for them. Students are able to develop a product, build a marketing strategy and then open for business at the Kids Business Expo marketplace.”

The students create their own products, made from scratch with one idea in mind.

Madison Puckett is an eighth grade student who went to the Business Expo.

“I thought it would be fun to do it with my best friend,” Puckett said. “It is also a good way to get the business out there.”

Sadie Blalock, a seventh grade student, also participated in the Expo.

“We spent two days mak-

ing content and still didn’t have enough,” she said.

The event has taken place several times over the years, but it has changed in some important ways.

“The event has grown over the past several years,” Barnett said. “When we first started, we opened the event up to middle and high school students. We found that middle school students were more interested at this time than high school students. They are extremely creative. The products that are produced are also very creative. They truly want to attract as many customers as possible.”

According to Puckett, the Expo was a real learning experience.

“I learned that communica-

tion is needed when running a business,” she said. “You can’t just do it, you have to communicate with each other to know what to do.”

Blalock also learned some important lessons.

“[We learned] perseverance,” she said. “We spent hours and hours working and still had to keep going.”

That’s exactly the kind of thing Barnett hopes students learn.

“We want them to think about what all goes into starting your own business, such as creating a business plan, marketing, etc.,” she said. “If this sparks their interest, then hopefully they will continue developing their business.”

Barnett is always amazed at

the creativity of middle school students.

“Last year we had several products involving woodworking,” she said. “We had someone that built birdhouses and someone who created pens out of wood. She sold out very quickly. Everyone loved them.”

Barnett hopes that the Expo will help students get a taste for starting a business in the region as an adult.

“Entrepreneurs and small businesses make up a large portion of our business in the region,” she said. “It is important to see what it takes to own your business and how much work is involved in owning your own business.”