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Gun supporters blast Md. plan to put serial numbers on ammo

Washington County sportsmen's group president speaks out against idea

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ANNAPOLIS - A crime-fighting plan to require serial numbers on all ammunition sold in Maryland was denounced Tuesday by gun supporters, including the president of a Washington County sportsmen's group.

Ammunition would be tracked through a state police database, paid for by a tax of 5 cents per round, starting Jan. 1, 2009.

(Credit: /)

"This gives law enforcement the DNA trail of the bullet," giving police a jump on investigations otherwise bogged down by lab-testing delays, Russell Ford said.

Testifying at a House Judiciary Committee meeting Tuesday, Ford, of Seattle, said he has a patent for ammunition-encoding technology.

Opponents, including committee members, took turns tearing into Ford's plan, calling it unwieldy and oppressive. Thirty-five people signed up to testify against the bill.

Referring to Ford's patent, Del. Michael D. Smigiel Sr., R-Caroline/Cecil/Kent/Queen Anne's, said, "I hope that you never make a dime, sir."

Del. Christopher B. Shank, R-Washington, said the state already has a ballistic "fingerprint" system that doesn't help solve crimes.

Washington County residents would bypass the system by going to West Virginia and Pennsylvania for ammunition, he said.

Outside the hearing room, while waiting to testify, Ray Givens, the president of the Washington County Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, voiced his opposition.

"This is a bill that will have minimal, if any at all, effect on solving crime, and will have a maximum effect on sportsmen," he said.

The bill, filed by Del. Emmett C. Burns Jr., D-Baltimore County, would require a serial number encoded on the base of each bullet and inside each cartridge casing. The same number would be on the outside of each box.

Violating the law would be a misdemeanor. Sellers who don't comply could face a prison sentence of up to one year and a fine of up to \$1,000.

The maximum fine for manufacturers would start at \$1,000 and increase to \$10,000 for a third offense.

But manufacturers that supply ammunition to Maryland have no intention of reconfiguring their production to meet the plan, Givens said.

Major manufacturers produce a total of about 20 million to 25 million rounds a day, said Alan Serven of Remington Arms Co., which makes ammunition in Lonoke, Ark.

"It's impossible to guarantee that level of accuracy at that volume," he said.

Serven and Gary Svendsen of Federal Cartridge Co. of Anoka, Minn., attended the hearing on behalf of their industry.

Svendsen said the cost per round would increase from pennies to dollars, putting police departments in a financial bind.

Eleven states have considered the same encoding system, but none have passed it, Ford said.

Burns suggested that Maryland be a leader, helping to "get rid of the savagery in our community."

But Smigiel said Maryland would take a bigger chunk out of crime by allowing citizens the right to carry guns.

Burns disagreed.

"It creates more bedlam," he said.

• To read the bill, go to <http://mlis.state.md.us/2008rs/billfile/hb0517.htm>

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