



Firearm Sensitive Place Restrictions

[SB 5098](#) (Sen. Valdez)

We know that the presence of a firearm greatly increases the risk of violence. Washington State can help make our communities safer by creating risk-based restrictions on firearms in sensitive places, and allowing local governing bodies to best identify locations where firearms should be prohibited. Last year, the legislature took a critical step forward by restricting firearms in libraries, aquariums, transit centers, and zoos. This bill builds on this process by prohibiting possession of a firearm in neighborhood or regional parks, state and local public buildings, and county fair grounds.

Washington State has already taken some important steps by restricting firearms in places like schools, childcare centers, bars and during protests and demonstrations. Last year, the Legislature passed SB 5444 which extended restrictions to other sensitive places, like libraries, aquariums and zoos.¹ Over the past several years, a number of empirical studies have shown that crime is higher when more people carry firearms in public places. ***Since 1966, the overwhelming majority—nearly 90%—of all mass shootings resulting in six or more deaths have occurred wholly or partly in locations where civilian guns were allowed*** or there was armed security or law enforcement present.² The presence of a firearm has the potential to increase the lethality of otherwise mundane situations - this risk is heightened in parks and other public places where children are present because of the additional risk that a child will access a firearm and unintentionally harm themselves or other people. States that have relaxed their firearm laws to allow firearms in most places have, according to one study, seen crime increase substantially—13 to 15 percent higher—10 years after the laws were adopted than it would have been, had those states not adopted those laws.³

SB 5098 Proposes to Extend Restrictions to the Following Locations:

- The premises of a neighborhood or regional park facility where children and youth are likely to be present. Cities, towns, counties, or other municipalities must designate the park facilities within its boundaries where children are likely to be present and post appropriate signage to notify the public that weapons are prohibited. These locations can include – but are not limited to – playgrounds, sports fields, swimming or wading pools, community centers, and skate parks.
- State or Local government buildings. This includes buildings or parts of buildings owned or leased by the federal government, where federal employees are regularly present for the purpose of performing their official duties. Examples include federal courthouses, Social Security offices, and certain areas within VA hospitals. Typically, states prohibit guns completely or partially in places where the presence of guns is particularly dangerous, such as where people consume alcohol, where tensions can flare, such as at sporting events or airports, or where there is a high danger that the presence of guns might chill First Amendment rights, such as at polling places and legislative buildings.
- The premises of county fairs and county fair facilities during the hours of operation in which the fair is open to the public, with an exception established for gun shows

¹ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/bills/summary?BillNumber=5444&Initiative=false&Year=2023>

² <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/guns-in-public/location-restrictions/>

³ <https://www.nber.org/papers/w23510>