

Governor signs compromise bill to combat repeat gun offenders

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SPRINGFIELD – Governor Bruce Rauner today signed a landmark criminal justice bill in his capitol office with Chicago Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson, Sen. Kwame Raoul (D-Chicago), House Republican Leader Jim Durkin (R-Western Springs), and other members of the General Assembly. The bill is a result of successful negotiations between the administration, City of Chicago and the General Assembly that will crack down on criminals who are repeat gun offenders, safely reduce the prison population, and create a more rehabilitative criminal justice system.

“This legislation provides new tools for law enforcement and the Courts to take on violent crime, while providing a second chance for non-violent, first time offenders,” Governor Rauner said. “This shows what is possible when leaders at all levels of government work together, and across party lines, to address the challenges facing our cities and state. It took several months of hard work, compromise and bipartisan cooperation – but together, we got it done.”

SB 1722 makes a number of changes to the criminal justice system to improve how we punish and rehabilitate gun offenders, as well as combat gang violence in Illinois. The bill will strengthen sentencing guidelines if they have committed a gun crime before. It also creates a First-Time Weapon Offender Diversion Program to address the underlying reasons why a young adult may have committed the offense.

"The Safe Neighborhoods Reform Act will help improve public safety in Chicago and across Illinois, holding repeat gun offenders accountable for their crimes," said Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel. "I want to thank Senator Kwame Raoul and Leader Jim Durkin for their leadership in advancing this important legislation, and Governor Rauner for signing it into law. Improving public safety is everyone's responsibility, and this law will help make neighborhoods across Illinois stronger, safer and more secure."

“Today marks an important first step toward reducing gun violence in Chicago and other gang-ridden areas in this state,” Leader Durkin said. “We need to take the streets back for the law abiding citizens of Illinois and turn the tide back to families that want nothing more than a chance to raise their children with safety.”

Additionally, the bill will create a Violent Crime Intelligence Task Force within the Illinois State Police. This task force will be dedicated to combatting gun violence and other violent crime in Chicago and around the state.

"The Safe Neighborhoods Reform Act will be of great benefit to the criminal justice system in Illinois and will give law enforcement the tools they need to pursue violent criminals. The Act creates the Violent Crime Intelligence Task Force, which will compliment proactive measures taken by police officers, and allow law enforcement to focus on taking violent criminals off the street to protect the lives and safety of Illinois citizens," said Illinois State Police Director Leo P. Schmitz.

The bill also contains a number of criminal justice reforms like expanding probation eligibility for first-time drug offenders and gives the Department of Corrections more discretion in awarding sentencing credit.

“The Safe Neighborhoods Reform Act represents the essential balancing of public safety and individualized assessment of those in our criminal justice system by encouraging

the judiciary to hold those who threaten public safety accountable without removing the judiciary's discretion to divert or provide lower sentences to low-risk or non-violent offenders," Sen. Raoul said. "The Act is not a cure-all to gun violence and our work on criminal justice reform is not complete."

"I am proud to join Governor Rauner, Leader Durkin and a bipartisan group of legislators to see the Safe Neighborhood Act signed into law. As a lifelong resident of the City of Chicago and as a representative of a segment of the City's northwest side, I am encouraged to see steps being taken to crack down on rising gun violence," explained State Representative Michael P. McAuliffe (R-Chicago). "I am honored to represent a district that is home to many members of the Chicago Police Department who work to keep the streets of Chicago safe, so I am hopeful that this newly enacted law will aid them in that effort."

Negotiations on SB 1722 were underway for months between the Rauner Administration and the General Assembly. The compromise bill passed the Senate in April, and the House passed it at the end of May. It takes effect in January of 2018.