

Illinois State Police Focuses On Reduction Of FOID Backlogs

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SPRINGFIELD - Because the Illinois State Police is rebuilding the Firearms Services Bureau – focusing on public safety and streamlining bureaucracy – the agency has reduced backlogs by 89 percent for renewals and 75 percent for new applicants. The agency has also significantly increased its revocation efforts in the wake of the murders in Aurora in 2019.

With a surge in applications in 2020, the FSB began a multi-faceted approach to increase efficiencies to reduce processing times, delete redundancies and streamline the process to eliminate future backlogs. The improvements have been three-fold: technology and process, hiring and legislation.

The combination of these efforts is already producing results with the FOID renewal backlog being reduced by 89 percent and the new FOID card backlog being reduced by 75 percent. Despite the high number of Firearm Transaction Inquiries – a number has remained consistently high for the past 18 months, the FSB is currently processing within the mandated 72 hours.

Technology and Process Improvements

In 2020, the FSB received an unprecedented number of new FOID and CCL applications. At its peak, applications for new FOID cards hit nearly 143,000 in October 2020.

The ISP had conducted an efficiency study on the FSB in March 2020 and discovered 72 opportunities to improve. Some of those changes had already been implemented and others are in the process of being developed and implemented.

After a review of the FOID statutes, the ISP supported legislation for a streamlined process for FOID renewals coupled with combining FOID and CCL expiration dates that will allow for further reduction in processing times by reducing the number of redundant background checks. Additional proposals to streamline the new FOID applications, and CCL new and renewal applications are currently being tested by the software vendor and ISP FSB.

Hiring

The ISP has been in the process of hiring new analysts to process applications since early 2020. The hiring process is ongoing and includes a minimum six-month training program to ensure applications are accurately and efficiently processed. Since early 2020, FSB has hired 35 Firearms Eligibility Analyst Trainees and will continue to hire additional analysts in the coming months. In addition to hiring analysts, the ISP also hired more call takers and other administrative personnel to improve application processing. The ISP will continue to refine applications processes and improve software systems to increase efficiencies with temporary contractual employees.

Legislation

In addition to hiring and improving technology and processes, the ISP advocated for legislative changes in the Spring and Summer of 2021. HB 562 was the first significant rewrite of the FOID Act since 1968. It also offered many revisions to the CCL Act and Appeals processes.

To streamline existing firearms statutes and focus resources on threats to safety, the legislation:

- Consolidates the FOID and CCL card into a single card.

- Renews FOID eligibility in sync with CCL eligibility by allowing automatic renewal of FOIDs when a CCL is approved or renewed.

- Grants the ISP the authority to create an electronic card, like when you get on a plane or get a vaccination or go to a movie, in lieu of an antiquated paper card, that can be instantly updated to reduce wait times and communicated by email or text.

- Allows for the use of Secretary of State address information rather than require card holders to submit separately (and redundantly) for a FOID.

- Establishes the Violent Crime Intelligence Task Force to aid in enforcement of FOID card revocation or suspension enforcement.

- Creates a publicly searchable database that contains the serial numbers of weapons that have been reported stolen.

Safety Enforcement

The Illinois State Police is ensuring the mission for firearms enforcement is to focus on safety, not bureaucracy, to make it hard for the bad guys and easy for the good guys.

The Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) will continue to conduct enforcement details but will strengthen partnerships to ensure revoked FOID cards are returned and the weapons the FOID cardholder possessed are accounted for.

Since 2019, DCI conducted more than 450 firearms enforcement details, with over 1,300 prohibited persons placed directly in compliance and over 10,000 firearms dispositions accounted for. To ensure procedures are consistent, DCI created the position of Statewide Gun Coordinator to create policies and procedures for FOID revocation details across the ISP. The details will recover revoked FOID cards and complete Firearm Disposition Record to ensure the guns don't remain with a revoked cardholder. The ISP has received additional funding sources that will strengthen the ISP's ability to trace firearms data, conduct revocation details partnering with local

agencies and expand enforcement. In addition, the ISP has conducted investigations of Concealed Carry Instructors throughout the state that resulted in more than 1,000 Concealed Carry License holders receiving additional training or having their permits revoked as a result of insufficient training.

Appeals

The newly created Office of Firearms Safety will timely review cases of those requesting the restoration of their right to possess firearms to determine if they are eligible under Illinois law. The ISP created the Office of Firearms Safety in 2020. The Firearms Safety Counsel (FSC) provides guidance and on the removal and restoration of firearms rights and privileges. The FSC developed protocols and procedures for evaluating risks regarding individuals who have been denied access to firearms or are revoked under Illinois law. The Office of Firearms Safe reduced the backlog of pending appeals by 17%. The vast majority of appeals are now completed within 60 days of file completion. The appeals bureau will support in the implementation of a newly-statutorily created bi-partisan FOID appeals board.