

## Gun advocates oppose stricter firearm laws at Second Amendment rally in Trenton



By [Brent Johnson/The Star-Ledger](#)

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[TRENTON](#) — Of the 1,000 or so gun advocates who gathered for a Second Amendment rally in Trenton today, Anthony Mills was among the most recent converts.

It wasn't until last month that the 42-year-old Jersey City resident became a gun owner. The catalyst, he said, was Hurricane Sandy.

"People were reverting to a feral state," Mills said. "I felt for my safety. I've never been afraid in my adult life of society going to the edge. But seeing people go crazy because they couldn't get gas for a couple of hours is frightening."

So he took firearms lessons, obtained a permit, and bought a Beretta pistol. And this morning — despite the bad weather — Mills drove an hour and 10 minutes to join the hundreds of others who packed outside the Statehouse in the rain to rally against stricter gun laws.

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**UPDATE:** [N.J. Democrats tout gun-control laws as firearm advocates rally in Trenton](#)

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"It's about liberty," Mills said, standing at the front of the crowd at the event, organized by the New Jersey Second Amendment Society. "We have onerous laws in this state. And more of those laws on law-abiding people isn't going to change the bad things that happen."

The battle over gun control has heightened across the nation in the wake of [the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings](#) in December — which left 20 children and six adults dead.

President Obama responded by [pushing Congress to pass](#) universal background checks and bans on military-style assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines.

In New Jersey, Democratic lawmakers introduced more than a dozen new bills to curb gun violence in the state, which already has the second-toughest gun laws in the nation. Meanwhile, [Gov. Chris Christie](#)

[formed a task force](#) to examine gun control, mental illness, violence and school safety — though he has dodged questions recently about whether he supports stricter gun laws.

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Christie, a Republican, declined an invitation to appear at today's rally.

State Sen. Michael Doherty (R-Warren) did appear, saying he couldn't "think of a safer place in the state of New Jersey than right here."

"Right on the other side of these doors, there are metal detectors, scanners and armed security," Doherty said, pointing to the Statehouse annex. "You know what? If it's good enough for elected officials who work inside this building, you ought to have the same rights. Because in your time of need, the police may not be there to protect you and your family. You may need to protect yourself."

A Rutgers-Eagleton poll released this week showed that fear over gun violence has dipped in New Jersey since the immediate aftermath of the Connecticut shootings. The poll showed 69 percent of New Jerseyans are "very concerned" about gun violence now, compared to 77 percent in the wake of the Sandy Hook massacre.

Frank Jack Fiamingo, the president of the New Jersey Second Amendment Society, said he isn't surprised.

"Do you think we feel differently than anybody else?" Fiamingo said. "I'm a grandfather. Most of these people are parents and grandparents. So when something like that happens, it's a tragedy for us as it is for anybody else."

"But these tragedies happen not because law-abiding people own guns. They happen because crazy or evil people or criminals get their hands on guns. What does that have to do with us?"

Jim Hawthorne, who owns Red Dot Firearms in Stanhope, said he's seen a significant increase in gun sales over the last few months because of the threat of a ban.

"People want to have the right to protect themselves," Hawthorne said.

Dave Vnenchak, 50, of Stanhope, agreed.

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"It's not about the guns," said Vnenchak, a Marine. "It's about our rights and our freedoms. I may not agree with what your choices are, but I will defend with my life your right to have those choices."

Attorney Evan Nappen was even more frank.

"I really despise anybody who says this question: 'Why do you need a large capacity magazine round? Why do you need an assault fire arm?'" Nappen said to the crowd. "First of all, it's a bill of rights, not a bill of needs. Second, I'm sorry, 'Is your house on fire right now? Why do you need a fire extinguisher?' 'Are you in a car accident right now? Why do you need a safety belt?' But when you need them, you damn well need them."

Another attorney, Daniel Schmutter, noted that taking away guns also puts society in danger.

"Disarming the honest doesn't disarm the dishonest," Schmutter said. "It emboldens them. Weakening the law abiding merely strengthens the lawbreaker."