



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 21, 2013

Chicago Gun Law Bars Historic Guns From Museum Displays

Chicago's stringent gun laws are so severe they border on the absurd. It has just been brought to the attention of Chicago Alderman Edward Burke that Chicago law [bars](#) city museums from displaying unloaded guns. In response, Burke has introduced an ordinance that would allow museums to display unloaded guns classified as "curios or relics."

If the bill is passed, the Pritzker Military Library will be able to begin displaying a World War II artifact personally returned stateside from a now-deceased U.S. army officer.



Fox News [reported](#), "A German Walther PP 7.65-mm handgun donated to the museum by relatives of U.S. Army Maj. General William P. Levine — one of the highest-ranking Jewish generals in American history — is currently kept in a safe along with a dozen other handguns at a gun range in suburban Lombard, where they are exempt from the Chicago Firearms Ordinance."

The weapon is a true artifact. Levine, one of the first Allied soldiers to liberate the Dachau concentration camp, had obtained it from a Nazi officer during World War II. Levine's family had donated his uniform, military papers, and other memorabilia to the Pritzker Military Library in March after his death, but the handgun has been unable to be seen by visitors because of the firearms ordinance.

"General Levine had the very unique experience of interviewing both captors and captives at Dachau as a U.S. intelligence officer," museum president Ken Clark explained. "So when you actually have a story attached to Levine, the historical value goes through the roof. For us, it means a heck of a lot historically."

Burke's plan could remedy the situation. Burke's proposal would permit items like the Nazi pistol to be classified as "curios and relics," defined by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives as firearms that are at least 50 years old and have been certified by a curator of a municipal, state, or federal museum, or any gun whose value is vested mostly from its rare features or associations with historical events or figures.

"Alderman Burke heard our story about this and really came to the same conclusion we did — there's really no clear code for museums," museum president Ken Clarke said Tuesday. "And because of the lack of clarity, we haven't taken any chances. So rather than hope for the best, we wanted to do this properly."

Burke formally introduced his legislation on Wednesday. "Museums are caught in a dilemma that if they have in their collections artifacts that can be defined as firearms, even though there's historical significance to the memento, they can't be registered in the city and can't be displayed," he said.



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“Chicago is home to several world-class museums,” Burke added. “And it has come to my attention that such an exemption is reasonably warranted to allow such institutions to display unloaded firearms that often accompany uniforms and other historical artifacts.”

Besides the obvious historical ramifications of barring the firearm from the museum, Levine’s family feels like it is an injustice to Levine for the firearm to have to be hidden.

Levine was reportedly haunted by his experiences in the concentration camp. “Every time he’d talk about it, when he’d come to the sentence, ‘And then I came to Dachau,’ he’d break down,” his wife Rhoda told the *Chicago Tribune* in April. “He couldn’t get that sentence out without the vivid memory of it. That choked him up.”

After 30 years of serving in the Army Reserves, Levine was able to bring the handgun back to the United States. By 1995, he began to share his experiences in World War II with local students and visitors from the Illinois Holocaust Museum. “For me, the most important and effective method of preventing another Holocaust is truth and education,” Levine said.

Clarke fully understands that the ban on displaying the handgun shows disregard for Levine’s experiences. “It’s about preserving the stories of citizen soldiers from World War II, World War I ... who have served our country,” he said.

Likewise, he notes a practical purpose for the proposed ordinance. “The reality is there are a lot of historic firearms sitting across the city in closets and attics that nobody knows what to do with.... Who knows where they end up,” he said. “If the city were to have this kind of ordinance, libraries and museums could be places where those firearms go and are taken off the streets and properly secured.”

Clarke observes that museums such as his have extensive security, and that artifacts are stored so that they may be “preserved for the long haul,” and are therefore “not very accessible.”

Clarke may be sufficiently aware of the implications of how the Chicago gun ban affects museums deleteriously, but he seems to be unaware of a worse situation that affects that city’s law-abiding citizens. Despite Chicago’s strict gun laws, the city continues to be plagued by homicides and gun violence. The *New York Times* [reported](#) in January of this year, “Chicago, a city with no civilian gun ranges and bans on both assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, finds itself laboring to stem a flood of gun violence that contributed to more than 500 homicides last year and at least 40 killings already in 2013.” Major studies done by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and the Centers for Disease Control — both in favor of citizen gun restrictions — found no gun control law that reduced crime done with guns, even as Chicagoans remain defenseless victims.

Richard Pearson, executive director of the Illinois State Rifle Association, asserted that the restrictions have done nothing but “made the citizens prey.”

Meanwhile, the Pritzker Military Library is not the only museum that would benefit from Burke’s ordinance, if passed. The Field Museum in Chicago has a historic gun collection in its archives that has never been on display.

“They’re just artifacts in our collection,” museum spokeswoman Nancy O’Shea said. “They can be accessed and studied [by] researchers who would find them interesting.”

But under Burke’s ordinance, the Field Museum, one of the largest in the city, would be able to display its gun collection to museum visitors.



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