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Needless Gun Permit Delays

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Laws that regulate gun ownership in the interest of public safety should be strong and tightly enforced. Easy access to weapons by people intent on committing violent crime remains a serious problem in Connecticut.

That said, legitimate gun owners who are only too willing to play by the rules should not be improperly inconvenienced when it's time for them to renew their permits. Many of these owners are experienced security professionals with clean records who need weapons for their livelihood.

Unfortunately, the state police Special License and Firearms unit has fallen into a pattern of denying permit renewals to reputable owners and then delaying their appeal hearings before the state Board of Firearms Permit Examiners by more than a year. The backlog of requests for appeal hearings has risen to nearly 400 a year.

Denials and delays have understandably provoked numerous complaints and a federal lawsuit by none other than the secretary of the board of examiners, M. Peter Kuck, accusing the state police of mismanagement, abusing its authority and violating the due process rights of citizens seeking gun permits.

Board members infuriated gun owners even more last week by removing Mr. Kuck as secretary and refusing to hear any more appeals pending an opinion from Attorney General Richard Blumenthal on whether the lawsuit prevents him from ruling impartially on cases.

The sensible thing would be to ask Mr. Kuck to refrain from voting on appeals until the matter of his potential conflict is settled. Suspending the renewal process and adding to an already extensive backlog only bolsters the argument that the system is mismanaged.

Public Safety Commissioner John A. Danaher III says his troopers are now speeding up the process. That's encouraging. Too bad that didn't happen until a lawsuit was filed.

One can understand why troopers - in the absence of strong gun-control laws - would want to do their part to limit the proliferation of guns in Connecticut.

But foot-dragging on gun permits for people who want to act responsibly is not the smartest way to fight terrorism or violent crime.

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