
CSENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Jesse Arreguín, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: SB 948 **Hearing Date:** March 17, 2026
Author: Arreguín
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Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: AB

Subject: *Firearms: safety certificates*

HISTORY

Source: Brady Campaign; Consumer Protection Policy Center at the University of San Diego School of Law

Prior Legislation: AB 1187 (Celeste Rodriguez), held in Assembly Appropriations, 2025
SB 1253 (Gonzalez), held in Assembly Appropriations, 2024
AB 138 (Com. on Budget), Ch. 78, Stats. of 2021
AB 645 (Irwin), Ch. 729, Stats. of 2019
SB 1289 (Com. on Judiciary), Ch. 92, Stats. of 2018
AB 1525 (Baker), Ch. 92, Stats. of 2017
AB 683 (Block), Ch. 761, Stats. of 2013
AB 52 (Scott), Ch. 942, Stats. of 2001

Support: Everytown for Gun Safety Action Fund; Giffords; Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America; Students Demand Action for Gun Sense in America; Team Enough – UC Berkeley Chapter

Opposition: California Rifle and Pistol Association; Gun Owners of California; National Rifle Association – Institute for Legislative Action; 5 Individuals

PURPOSE

The purpose of this bill is to require personal firearm importers to obtain a firearm safety certificate within 60 days of moving to California, and to require all firearm safety certificate applicants, commencing July 1, 2028, to complete a firearm training course that includes instruction on firearm safety and live-fire shooting exercises.

Existing law provides that a well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed. (U.S. Const., 2nd Amend.)

Existing law specifies that a felony is a crime that is punishable by death, by imprisonment in the state prison, or, notwithstanding any other law, by imprisonment in a county jail, as specified, and specifies that every other crime or public offense is a misdemeanor except those offenses that are classified as infractions. (Pen. Code, § 17, subd. (a).)

Existing law generally prohibits the sale, lease or transfer of firearms unless the person has been issued a license by the Department of Justice (DOJ) and establishes various exceptions to this prohibition. (Pen. Code, §§ 26500-26625.)

Existing law provides that a license to sell firearms is subject to forfeiture for any violation of a number of specified prohibitions and requirements, with limited exceptions. (Pen. Code, §§ 26800-26915.)

Existing law provides that where neither party to a firearms transaction holds a dealer's license (i.e. a "private party transaction"), the parties shall complete the transaction through a licensed firearms dealer. (Pen. Code, § 27545.)

Existing law sets forth various exemptions to the requirement that a private party transaction occur through a licensed dealer (Pen. Code, §§ 27850-27970.)

Existing law establishes a process by which an individual may obtain and renew a license to carry a pistol, revolver or other firearm capable of being concealed upon the person, also known as a Concealed Carry Weapon (CCW) license. (Pen. Code, § 26150 et. seq.)

Existing law provides that for new CCW applicants, the course of training for issuance of a license must meet the following criteria:

- The course shall be no less than 16 hours in length.
- The course shall include instruction on firearm safety, firearm handling, shooting technique, safe storage, legal methods to transport firearms and securing firearms in vehicles, laws governing where permit holders may carry firearms, laws regarding the permissible use of a firearm, and laws regarding the permissible use of lethal force in self-defense.
- The course shall include a component, no less than one hour in length, on mental health and mental health resources.
- Except for the component on mental health and mental health resources, the course shall be taught and supervised by firearms instructors certified by DOJ.
- The course shall require students to pass a written examination to demonstrate their understanding of the covered topics.
- The course shall include live-fire shooting exercises on a firing range and shall include a demonstration by the applicant of safe handling of, and shooting proficiency with, each firearm that the applicant is applying to be licensed to carry. (Pen. Code, § 26165, subd. (a)(1)-(6).)

Existing law defines a "personal firearm importer" as a non-licensed individual who has moved into the State of California, owns a firearm that is legal within the state, and intends to possess that firearm within the state, as specified. (Pen. Code, § 17000.)

Existing law requires that a personal firearm importer does one of the following within 60 days of bringing a firearm into California:

- Submit a report to DOJ including information concerning that individual and a description of the firearm in question, as specified.
- Sell or transfer the firearm via private party transaction, as specified.

- Sell or transfer the firearm to a licensed dealer, as specified; or,
- Sell or transfer the firearm to a sheriff or police department. (Pen. Code, § 27560, subd. (a).)

Existing law establishes the intent of the Legislature in enacting specified provisions to require that persons who obtain firearms have a basic familiarity with those firearms, including, but not limited to, the safe handling and storage of those firearms. (Pen. Code, §31610)

Existing law requires DOJ to develop firearm safety certificates to be issued by instructors certified by the department to those persons who have complied with specified requirements regarding firearm safety, and which expire 5 years after the date of issuance. (Pen. Code, §31655, subds. (a), (c).)

Existing law requires that a firearm safety certificate to include, but not be limited to, the following information:

- A unique handgun safety certificate identification number;
- The holder's full name;
- The holder's date of birth;
- The holder's driver's license or identification number;
- The holder's signature;
- The signature of the issuing instructor; and,
- The date of issuance. (Pen. Code, § 31655, subd. (b).)

Existing law prohibits a licensed firearm dealer from delivering a firearm unless the person receiving the firearm presents to the dealer a valid firearm safety certificate. Requires the firearm dealer to retain a photocopy of the firearm safety certificate as proof of compliance. (Pen. Code, § 26840, subd. (a).)

Existing law prohibits a person from purchasing or receiving any firearm, except an antique firearm, without a valid firearm safety certificate, except that in the case of a handgun, an unexpired handgun safety certificate may be used. (Pen. Code, § 31615, subd. (a).)

Existing law prohibits a person from selling, delivering, loaning, or transferring any firearm, except an antique firearm, to any person who does not have a valid firearm safety certificate, except that in the case of a handgun, an unexpired handgun safety certificate may be used. (Pen. Code, § 31615, subd. (a).)

Existing law provides that a person who violates the above prohibition is guilty of a misdemeanor. (Pen. Code, § 31615, subd. (b).)

Existing law provides that a DOJ-certified instructor shall not issue a firearm safety certificate to any person who has not complied with specified safety requirements or who is under 18, a violation of which is grounds for the revocation of the instructor's certification. (Pen. Code, § 31625.)

Existing law requires DOJ to develop a firearm safety certificate instruction manual in various languages, as specified. (Pen. Code, § 31630.)

Existing law requires the DOJ to certify firearm safety certificate instructors and prescribe a minimum level of skill, knowledge and competency for all such instructors, as specified. (Pen. Code, § 31635.)

Existing law requires the DOJ to develop a written objective test in various languages, passage of which is a prerequisite to obtaining a firearm safety certificate, and to develop a study guide for that test. (Pen. Code, §§ 31640, 31641, 31645.)

Existing law contains various exemptions to the firearm safety certificate requirement, including for active and retired peace officers, licensed firearm dealers, federally licensed collectors, concealed carry permit holders, hunting license holders, and specified individuals who receive a firearm via operation of law. (Pen. Code § 31700.)

This bill prohibits a person from bringing any firearm, except an antique firearm, into this state without obtaining a valid firearm safety certificate within 60 days of bringing that firearm into the state if the person is required to report the importation of the firearm to the DOJ.

This bill provides that a violation of this prohibition is punishable as a misdemeanor.

This bill specifies that this prohibition does not apply to a person if evidence of that violation arises only as the result of the person applying for a firearm safety certificate after the expiration of the 60-day period.

This bill requires a personal firearm importer that elects to retain an imported firearm and report it to the DOJ pursuant to existing law to obtain a valid firearm safety and include a copy of the certificate in the report.

This bill requires an applicant for a firearm safety certificate on or after July 1, 2028 to complete a training course that meets all of the following conditions:

- The training shall be no less than 8 hours in length, including at least one hour of live shooting.
- The training shall include instruction on the following topics:
 - Federal and state laws related to possession, transportation, and storage of firearms.
 - The importance of secure storage to prevent unauthorized access and use of firearms.
 - Safe firearm handling and fundamentals of shooting firearms.
 - Risks of firearms and causes of accidents.
 - How to legally relinquish or transfer a firearm.
 - State laws pertaining to self-defense and techniques for conflict resolution.
 - Mental health, suicide prevention, and domestic violence issues associated with firearms and firearm violence.
- The training shall be taught and supervised by firearms instructors certified by the DOJ pursuant to existing law.
- The live fire shooting exercises shall take place on a firing range and shall include a demonstration by the applicant of safe handling of firearms and basic firearm shooting proficiency.

This bill specifies that its training requirement does not apply to the categories of individuals specified in existing law that are exempt from the firearm safety certificate requirement.

This bill specifies that the DOJ may promulgate regulations and provide additional information for its implementation, and that the Dealers' Record of Sale (DROS) Special Account may be used, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for any costs associated with the law's implementation and ongoing expenses.

COMMENTS

1. Need for This Bill

According to the author:

Although California has enacted some of the strongest gun safety laws in the nation, currently state law does not require those that import guns into California to secure a Firearm Safety Certificate. Additionally, new gun purchasers are not required to complete education courses or training in safe firearm handling, including live-fire instruction. SB 948 address this gap by requiring comprehensive and meaningful training for anyone seeking to obtain a Firearm Safety Certificate. By strengthening the education and training component tied to the certificate, this measure ensures that individuals who choose to own firearms have demonstrated both a clear understanding of applicable laws and the practical skills necessary to handle a firearm safely.

2. Background on Firearm Safety Certificates

Beginning in 1993, possession of a handgun safety certificate was required to transfer firearms, and the Department of Justice was required to develop the process for individuals to obtain a handgun safety certificate. Exemptions were provided for specific classes of individuals who did not need to obtain a firearm safety certificate, such as peace officers and persons with concealed carry permits, and for specific firearm transfers.¹ Senate Bill 52 (Scott), Chapter 942, Statutes of 2001, repealed the basic firearms safety certificate scheme and replaced it with the more stringent handgun safety certificate scheme. SB 52 provided that, effective January 1, 2003, no person may purchase, transfer, receive, or sell a handgun without a Handgun Safety Certificate (HSC). SB 1080 (Committee on Public Safety, Ch. 711, Statutes of 2010), required DOJ to prepare a pamphlet that summarizes California firearms laws as they pertain to a person other than law enforcement officers or members of the armed services. This pamphlet included, but was not limited to, the following: lawful possession, licensing procedures, transportation and use of firearms, the acquisition of hunting licenses, and other provisions as specified.

Senate Bill 683 (Block), Chapter 761, Statutes of 2013, which took effect January 1, 2015, changed the name of the Handgun Safety Certificate program to the Firearm Safety Certificate (FSC) program and applied the requirements to all firearms, including handguns and long guns. Under SB 693, the DOJ was required to develop a firearm safety certificate instruction manual and make the manual available to licensed firearms dealers, who were in turn required to provide

¹ See Penal Code §§31700 et. seq.

the manual to the general public.² These materials educate the public about their legal responsibilities and risks related to firearm ownership and include information on firearm accidents and misuse.

3. Effect of This Bill

Existing law requires a person to obtain an FSC before purchasing or receiving any firearm except an antique firearm and requires the recipient of the sale, delivery, loan or transfer of any firearm except an antique firearm to possess a valid FSC. A violation of these requirements is punishable as a misdemeanor.³ Exempt from this requirement are concealed carry permit holders, active and retired peace officers, licensed firearm dealers, federally licensed collectors, hunting licensees, and specified individuals who receive a firearm via operation of law.⁴ To obtain an FSC, an applicant 18 years of age or older must pass an objective written test (developed by DOJ, administered by a DOJ-certified instructor, and required to cover various specified topics) with a passing grade of at least 75%.⁵ FSCs are issued by the instructors that administer the FSC test and are valid for 5 years from the date of issue.⁶ Notably, there is no requirement that firearm owners regularly update or renew their FSC – once an FSC expires, an individual is not required to obtain a new one unless they purchase or receive a new firearm.

This bill consists of two distinct requirements related to FSCs: the first requires personal firearms importers to obtain an FSC within 60 days of moving to the state, and the second requires all FSC applicants to complete a course of training as a prerequisite for obtaining an FSC. Each set of provisions is discussed in turn below.

Importer Requirement

Under existing law, “personal firearm importers” are individuals who move into the state of California to establish residency, own a firearm and intend to possess that firearm within the state. The law requires importers to take one of four actions with respect to the imported firearms within 60 days of entering the state: 1) submit a report to the DOJ with information regarding the CA-compliant firearm(s); 2) sell or transfer the firearm(s) via private party transfer; 3) sell or transfer the firearm to a licensed dealer; or 4) sell or transfer the firearm to a county sheriff’s office or local police department.⁷ Firearms that may be legally possessed in another state but not in California (e.g., unsafe handguns and certain assault-style weapons) may only be sold or transferred pursuant to options (2)-(4).

This bill prohibits a personal firearm importer from bringing any firearm, except an antique firearm, into this state without obtaining an FSC within 60 days of importing the firearm, provided the person intends to continue to possess the firearm rather than sell or transfer it. A violation of this prohibition is punishable as a misdemeanor under the importation statute, not the FSC statute that this requirement amends. The bill also specifies that this prohibition does not

² DOJ, *Firearm Safety Certificate Manual for California Firearms Dealers and DOJ Certified Instructors* (Jun. 2025) <<https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/media/fsc-manual.pdf>>

³ Penal Code §31615(a), (b). This statute also grandfathered in purchases (or receipt by, and sales, deliveries, loans and transfers to, individuals with valid *handgun* safety certificates. However, this is dead letter law, as the most recent handgun safety certificate would have expired on December 31, 2019.

⁴ Penal Code, § 31700

⁵ Penal Code, §§ 31640, 31641, 31645.

⁶ Penal Code, § 31655.

⁷ Penal Code, § 27560, subd. (a).

apply to a person if evidence of that violation arises only as the result of the person applying for an FSC after the expiration of the 60-day period.

Training Requirement

The second major component of this bill is a requirement that an applicant for an FSC on or after July 1, 2028, must complete a course of training that meets several specifications. The bill requires that the training be at least 8 hours in length, with at least one hour of live shooting, and cover seven specified topics, including state and federal firearm laws, safe firearm handling and shooting fundamentals, how to properly relinquish a firearm, and the importance of secure storage, among others. The training must be taught and supervised by DOJ Certified Instructors,⁸ and the live fire shooting exercises must include a demonstration by the applicant of safe handling of firearms and basic firearm shooting proficiency. The bill explicitly exempts from this training requirement individuals that are exempt from the FSC requirement generally, although it is not evident why such an exemption is necessary at all, if the individuals who may benefit from it are already not required to obtain an FSC.

This training requirement raises several questions that the Author and Committee may wish to consider. First, after July 1, 2028, personal firearm importers wishing to maintain possession of imported firearms must complete their FSC training within two months of moving to a new state. Given the various challenges and undertakings involved in moving to a new state, it may be logistically difficult for an individual to schedule and complete an FSC training within two months of moving. It may be prudent to give firearm importers a longer runway to obtain an FSC once the training requirement goes into effect. Second, under existing law, applicants for a license to carry a concealed weapon (CCW) are also required to complete a course of training prior to obtaining their license, the elements of which are substantially similar to those comprising the FSC training in this bill.⁹ Given the different risks and responsibilities associated with merely purchasing and possessing a firearm as opposed to carrying a concealed firearm on one's person, should the FSC training requirements be less rigorous than this bill proposes?

4. Constitutional Considerations

The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides, “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” In *New York State Rifle and Pistol Association v. Bruen* (2022) 597 U.S. 1, the U.S. Supreme Court established a new test for determining whether a law comports with the Second Amendment’s right to bear arms, abrogating the earlier test that lower courts had been using since the Supreme Court’s 2008 decision in *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008) 554 U.S. 570. Under the *Bruen* test, the first inquiry is whether the Second Amendment’s plain text covers the individual conduct at issue.¹⁰ Next, in defense of a law regulating firearms, the government must show more than that the regulation promotes an important governmental interest – rather, the law must be “consistent with this Nation’s historical tradition of firearm regulation.”¹¹

⁸ Under existing law, the DOJ must maintain a certified instructor program. (Pen. Code, §31635.) For more information on this program, visit <<https://oag.ca.gov/firearms/fscinfo>>.

⁹ A major difference is that for new CCW applicants, the course of training must be 16 hours in length, but for renewal applicants, the course need only be 8 hours, which is the length required under this bill for the FSC training course. See Pen. Code, § 26165.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 23-25.

¹¹ *Id.*

Under the *Bruen* decision, “how and why the regulations burden a law-abiding citizen’s right to armed self-defense” matters, and further, “whether modern and historical regulations impose a comparable burden on the right of armed self-defense and whether that burden is comparably justified are ‘central’ considerations when engaging in an analogical inquiry.”¹² The Court’s opinion also underscored that the required analogical reasoning under the new *Bruen* standard is “neither a regulatory straightjacket nor a regulatory blank check,” and that the test “requires only that the government identify a well-established and representative historical analogue, not a historical twin.” Thus, even if a modern-day regulation is not a dead ringer for historical precursors, it still may be analogous enough to pass constitutional muster.”¹³ Of particular relevance to this bill, the Court, in a footnote to the decision, appeared to affirm the constitutionality of certain concealed carry licensing regimes which require applicants to undergo a background check or pass a firearms safety course.¹⁴ However, this footnote also stressed that “because any permitting scheme can be put toward abusive ends, we do not rule out constitutional challenges to shall-issue regimes where, for example, lengthy wait times in processing license applications or exorbitant fees deny ordinary citizens their right to public carry.”

Because an FSC is a prerequisite to even purchasing a firearm (where *Bruen* discussed prerequisites to obtaining a concealed carry permit), this bill’s training requirement may face constitutional challenges, namely that such a requirement unduly burdens the core right protected by the Second Amendment: carrying a firearm in the home for self-defense. The inquiry will likely revolve around whether the training requirement imposes an unreasonable financial burden, an unreasonable delay in exercising one’s right to bear arms, and whether sufficient historical analogues exist. A recent case from Maryland regarding that state’s handgun qualification statute (HQL), which includes a 4-hour firearm safety training course, may be the most instructive.¹⁵ In that case, the 4th Circuit, sitting en banc, reasoned that the HQL fell easily within the scope of “shall-issue licensing laws that the Supreme Court indicated are presumptively constitutional, and further held that:

We are not free to ignore the Supreme Court’s clear guidance on the presumptive constitutionality of “shall-issue” licensing regimes, nor to unduly constrain legislatures seeking to employ such measures to prevent handgun misuse and violent criminal activity. So, in line with the Court’s “shall-issue” discussion, governments may continue to enforce “shall-issue” firearms licensing regulations that impose non-abusive, objective requirements like background checks and firearm safety training.¹⁶

5. Prior Legislation

Since 2024, there have been two other legislative efforts aimed at addressing the firearm importer FSC “loophole.” In 2024, SB 1253 (Gonzalez) would have prohibited a person from bringing any firearm, except an antique firearm, into California as a personal firearm importer without first obtaining a firearm safety certificate within 120 days of importing that firearm.

¹² *Id.* at 29.

¹³ *Id.* at 30.

¹⁴ *Id.* at *fn.9*. The concurring opinion issued by Justice Kavanaugh and Chief Justice Roberts also appeared to support the view that licensing regimes that require “a license applicant to undergo fingerprinting, a background check, a mental health records check, and *training in firearms handling* [emphasis added] and in laws regarding the use of force, among other possible requirements,” pass constitutional muster. *Id.* at 80.

¹⁵ *Md. Shall Issue, Inc. v. Moore* (2024), 116 F.4th 211

¹⁶ *Id.* at 229.

SB 1253 did not include a training requirement and died in the Assembly Appropriations Committee. This bill is nearly identical to last year's AB 1187 (Celeste Rodriguez), which also died in Assembly Appropriations.

6. Amendments

Some stakeholders have expressed concerns that violations under this bill may lead to higher penalties when coupled with certain enhancements set forth in Penal Code section 27590. In order to avoid these higher penalties, the Author has agreed to take amendments in committee to clarify that under no circumstances should a violation of the bill's FSC requirement be punishable as a felony. Amendments to be taken in committee also include technical and clarifying amendments.

7. Argument in Support

According to the Brady Campaign, the bill's sponsor:

California has the most comprehensive system of regulating firearms purchases and possession, yet currently does not require either training or education to obtain a firearms safety certificate. It is common sense that those who are purchasing a firearm should be properly trained on how to use, handle, and store firearms and should participate in live-fire training. However, a study from 2015 found that nearly 40% of all gun owners never received any training.

Firearm training is crucial not only as an effective means to prevent accidental shootings, it also equips gun purchasers to actually protect themselves in the way they envision. Referring to self-defense situations, a study noted that "the quality and frequency of training to maintain acquired skills is predictive of how someone with a firearm will react in a stressful situation and whether they can successfully defend themselves." For example, a police spokesman and a law enforcement firearms trainer told the study's authors "when your adrenaline is pumping and your heart is beating faster, you're not going to shoot the same way you do at the range — not without a lot of training." [...] The study accordingly suggested that civilian gun owners should undertake a combination of classroom, live fire, and judgment shooting. The authors also noted that these reasonable training requirements pale in comparison to what states regularly demand of would-be drivers in driver's training or would-be business owners who want to cut hair or paint nails.

The responsibilities inherent in carrying a firearm attach from the moment a person takes possession of the firearm, which makes coupling firearm purchasing with training sound policy. Indeed, several other states already require training for gun purchase or possession including Oregon, New Jersey, Delaware, Hawaii, Massachusetts and Maryland. It is time for California to do the same.

8. Argument in Opposition

The National Rifle Association-Institute for Legislative Action writes:

Under current California law, individuals who wish to purchase or receive a firearm must first obtain a Firearm Safety Certificate by passing a written examination administered by a Department of Justice certified instructor. Senate Bill 948 would fundamentally change this process by requiring, beginning July 1, 2028, that applicants complete a state-approved training course lasting no less than eight hours, including at least a one-hour live fire component, before they may obtain a certificate.

[...] While training is beneficial when voluntarily pursued, conditioning the exercise of a constitutional right on mandatory state-prescribed classroom instruction creates substantial practical barriers and raises serious constitutional concerns. In *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen*, the U.S. Supreme Court reaffirmed that the right to keep and bear arms belongs to ordinary, law-abiding citizens and may not be conditioned on discretionary or burdensome licensing schemes unsupported by historical tradition. SB 948 creates unnecessary time commitments, logistical challenges, and financial costs associated with these requirements, burdening ordinary working Californians who simply wish to exercise a constitutional right.

Beyond expanding training mandates for current residents, SB 948 also imposes new restrictions on individuals who relocate to California. Under existing law, individuals who move into the state with lawfully owned firearms must submit a report to the Department of Justice within sixty days identifying those firearms. SB 948 would convert this administrative reporting requirement into a regulatory barrier by requiring these individuals to obtain a Firearm Safety Certificate within the same sixty-day period and include proof of that certificate with their report. In effect, the bill would create a new pathway to criminal liability for individuals who have committed no wrongful act other than moving to California with firearms they already lawfully possess. Individuals relocating for employment, family obligations, or military assignments could find themselves subject to criminal penalties simply for failing to navigate California's complex regulatory framework within a short timeframe.

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