

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

CRAIG PHILIPS;  
GUN OWNERS OF AMERICA, INC.; and  
GUN OWNERS FOUNDATION,

*Plaintiffs,*

v.

LT. COL. GEORGE L. BIVENS, in His  
Official Capacity as Acting Commissioner  
of the Pennsylvania State Police; and  
SHERIFF MICHAEL T. SLUPE, in His  
Official Capacity as the Butler County  
Sheriff,

*Defendants.*

Civil Action No. \_\_\_\_\_

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**DECLARATION OF VAL W. FINNELL**

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1. My name is Val W. Finnell. I am a U.S. citizen and resident of South Carolina. I make this declaration in support of Plaintiffs' Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief. Unless otherwise stated, I make this declaration based on personal knowledge. If called as a witness, I can testify to the truth of the statements contained herein.

2. I am the Pennsylvania State Director of Gun Owners of America, Inc. ("GOA").

3. In that capacity, I am in contact with GOA staff that is in daily contact with members and supporters regarding their concerns, questions, requests, and suggestions on how GOA can best represent their interests. I am also in daily contact with GOA members within Pennsylvania.

4. Gun Owners of America, Inc. is a California non-stock corporation with its principal place of business in Springfield, Virginia. GOA is organized and operated as a nonprofit membership organization that is exempt from federal income taxes under Section 501(c)(4) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. GOA was formed in 1976 to preserve and defend the Second Amendment rights of gun owners. GOA has more than two million members and supporters across the country, including residents of this district, many of whom are or will be irreparably harmed by 18 Pa.C.S. § 6109(e)(1)(ii) and the policies and practices by which it is enforced, which permanently disqualify otherwise-eligible Pennsylvanians from obtaining a License to Carry Firearms based on a prior conviction under the Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act (“CSDDCA”).

5. Gun Owners Foundation is a Virginia non-stock corporation, with its principal place of business in Springfield, Virginia. GOF is organized and operated as a non-profit legal defense and educational foundation that is exempt from federal income taxes under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. GOF is supported by gun owners across the country, including Pennsylvania residents, many of whom are and will be irreparably harmed by 18 Pa.C.S. § 6109(e)(1)(ii) and the policies and practices by which it is enforced. GOF is financially supported by gun owners across the country, including by two of its board members, and from contributions received from individuals through the Combined Federal Campaign, all of whom receive updates about GOF’s activities and fund the organization’s activities so that it can, *inter alia*, file litigation such as this to preserve, protect, and defend their right to keep and bear arms.

6. GOA and GOF members and supporters desire and overwhelmingly support our involvement in litigation to protect their right to carry firearms in public for lawful self-defense – including the right to obtain a License to Carry Firearms on the same terms as other law-abiding,

firearm-eligible citizens – a right that is being unconstitutionally infringed by the challenged disqualification.

7. In Pennsylvania, a License to Carry Firearms (“LTCF”) is not merely a concealed-carry permit. Without an LTCF, a law-abiding citizen is substantially restricted from carrying or transporting a firearm in a vehicle, carrying a firearm in the City of Philadelphia, carrying a firearm for protection during a declared state of emergency, and otherwise bearing arms in ordinary public life. *See* 18 Pa.C.S. §§ 6106, 6107, 6108, 6109.

8. Under Pennsylvania law, a sheriff “shall issue” an LTCF unless one of the statutory disqualifications set forth in 18 Pa.C.S. § 6109(e)(1) applies. Among those, Section 6109(e)(1)(ii) provides that a license shall not be issued to any individual who has been convicted of an offense under the CSDDCA. As enforced, that provision permanently disqualifies a person from obtaining an LTCF based on any such conviction – including a minor, nonviolent possessory offense – even when the person remains fully eligible to acquire and possess firearms under both Pennsylvania and federal law.

9. For years, GOA members and supporters in Pennsylvania who remain eligible under both state and federal law to acquire and possess firearms have nonetheless been unable to obtain an LTCF, and thus unable to bear arms in public for lawful self-defense, solely because of a past conviction that triggers a Section 6109(e)(1) disqualification but does not otherwise render them ineligible to possess firearms.

10. GOA has been in contact with members and supporters who wish to obtain an LTCF and to carry a firearm in public for lawful self-defense, in accordance with the law, but who are barred from doing so by the challenged provision.

11. For example, one GOA member who resides in Pennsylvania is a U.S. citizen who is eligible to acquire and possess firearms under both Pennsylvania and federal law, and who has lawfully purchased firearms after passing the required background checks. Nevertheless, that member is permanently ineligible for an LTCF under 18 Pa.C.S. § 6109(e)(1)(ii) because of a single, decades-old, nonviolent conviction for possession of a small amount of marijuana. That member has since lived a stable, productive, and law-abiding life, and there is no current evidence that he poses a danger to public safety. That member desires to carry a handgun for lawful self-defense throughout Pennsylvania – including while operating a motor vehicle and while visiting Philadelphia – but cannot lawfully do so because he has been denied an LTCF.

12. A second GOA member who resides in Pennsylvania is likewise a U.S. citizen who is eligible to acquire and possess firearms under both Pennsylvania and federal law, but who is unable to obtain an LTCF because of a prior conviction that disqualifies him under 18 Pa.C.S. § 6109(e)(1). That member likewise remains eligible to possess firearms under both Pennsylvania and federal law, and likewise desires to carry a handgun in public for lawful self-defense but cannot lawfully do so because he has been denied, or is ineligible for, an LTCF.

13. Both of the GOA members described above are eligible to possess firearms under both Pennsylvania and federal law. Both are unable to obtain a Pennsylvania License to Carry Firearms because of their respective CSDDCA convictions. Neither member poses any current, individualized risk of dangerousness, and each remains a law-abiding citizen entitled to the protections of the Second Amendment.

14. But for the challenged disqualification and the criminal penalties associated with carrying a firearm without a license, *see* 18 Pa.C.S. §§ 6106, 6107, 6108, these members would

obtain a License to Carry Firearms and would carry a firearm in public for lawful self-defense throughout Pennsylvania.

15. Protection of the rights and interests advanced in this litigation is germane to GOA and GOF's respective missions, which include the effort to preserve and protect the Second Amendment and the rights of Americans to keep and bear arms. GOA and GOF routinely litigate cases throughout the country on behalf of their members and supporters, and GOA and GOF are capable of fully and faithfully representing the interests of their members and supporters without participation by each of the individuals.

I, Val W. Finnell, declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Jul 6, 2026

DATE

*Val W. Finnell*

Val W. Finnell (Jul 6, 2026 18:46:34 EDT)

VAL W. FINNELL