

California's tough gun laws getting stricter

By Jonathan J. Cooper, AP

SACRAMENTO – California's gun laws, already some of the strictest in the nation, will get even more stringent next year.

Gov. Jerry Brown signed onto much of the gun-control agenda advocated by legislative Democrats, who are clamoring to crack down in the wake of high-profile mass shootings including last year's terrorist attack in San Bernardino.

The Democratic governor signed six bills Friday requiring gun owners to give up magazines holding more than 10 rounds and to undergo a background check before they can purchase ammunition, among other measures.

While he vetoed five bills – including a one-gun-per-month purchase limit – he endorsed the most ambitious pieces of the Legislature's gun control push over the roar of gun-rights advocates frustrated by the increasing weight of restrictions.

“Independence and freedom and liberty in California has been chopped down at the knees and kicked between the legs,” said Sam Paredes, executive director of the advocacy group Gun Owners of California.

Brown's actions are consistent with his mixed record on gun control. Some of the enacted bills duplicate provisions of a November ballot measure by Democratic Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom. Some of the vetoed measures also appear in Newsom's initiative, giving voters a chance to overturn Brown's veto and protecting the initiative from becoming moot.

“My goal in signing these bills is to enhance public safety by

tightening our existing laws in a responsible and focused manner, while protecting the rights of law-abiding gun owners," Brown wrote in a one-sentence message to lawmakers.

The state's move to tighten laws further comes amid years of gridlock at the federal level, which spawned a tense clash in Washington last week as Democrats camped out on the floor of the U.S. House and shouted down Republicans.

"Strong gun laws work. ... What we're doing in California is a better job of keeping guns out of dangerous hands," said Amanda Wilcox, a spokeswoman for the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, whose daughter was killed by a shooter using a high-capacity magazine.

Brown's action will require people who own magazines that hold more than 10 rounds to give them up. It extends a 1999 law that made it illegal to buy a high-capacity magazine or to bring one into the state but allowed people who already owned them to keep them.

In an attempt to slow gun users from rapidly reloading, the governor signed a bill outlawing new weapons that have a device known as a bullet button. Gun makers developed bullet buttons to get around California's assault weapons ban, which prohibited new rifles with magazines that can be detached without the aid of tools. A bullet button allows a shooter to quickly dislodge the magazine using the tip of a bullet or other small tool.

People will be allowed to keep weapons they already own with bullet buttons, which are often referred to as "California compliant," but they'll be required to register them.

Brown also endorsed a bill requiring ammunition sellers to be licensed, buyers to undergo background checks and transactions to be recorded. It's the Legislature's second attempt to regulate ammunition sales after a judge struck down a 2009 law as too vague.

He also opted to require a background check before a gun can be loaned to someone who isn't a family member.

The governor vetoed an effort to expand a 6-month-old program that allows courts to temporarily restrict gun ownership rights for people suspected of being dangerous. He decided against restricting all firearm purchases to one per month, a limitation that already applies to handguns.

For the third time since 2012, he vetoed a bill requiring gun owners to report a lost or stolen firearm to authorities within five days.

"I continue to believe that responsible people report the loss or theft of a firearm and irresponsible people do not; it is not likely that this bill would change that," he wrote in a veto message.

California is one of six states to get the highest grade from the pro-gun control Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

Associated Press writer Don Thompson contributed to this report.