

U.S. Supreme Court weighs challenge to New York gun transport limits

By Andrew Chung – Reuters News

NEW YORK (Reuters) - The U.S. Supreme Court will hear its first major gun rights case in nearly a decade on Monday in a challenge backed by the National Rifle Association over a now-amended New York City handgun regulation that had prevented licensed owners from taking their handguns outside the city.

The nine justices will hear arguments in an appeal by three handgun owners and the New York state affiliate of the NRA - the gun rights group closely aligned with President Donald Trump and other Republicans - who say the regulation violates the U.S. Constitution's Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms.

Gun control advocates have said that if the justices choose to issue a broad ruling expanding gun rights, it could jeopardize a variety of firearms restrictions passed in recent years by state and local governments across the country, including expanded background checks and confiscations of weapons from individuals who a court has deemed dangerous.

Gun control is a contentious issue in the United States, which has experienced numerous mass shootings. Since 2013, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted more than 300 gun control laws, according to the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. Republican opposition in Congress has been instrumental in thwarting passage of new federal laws.

"The future of life-saving gun safety laws across our country is very directly on the line with this case," the center's litigation director Hannah Shearer said.

The court has a 5-4 conservative majority. Its ruling is due by the end of June.

"I believe it will change the way the Second Amendment is applied to everyone who owns a gun in the country," said Staten Island resident Romolo Colantone, one of the plaintiffs.

The dispute centers on New York's handgun "premises" licenses that allowed holders to transport their firearm only to a handful of shooting ranges within the city, and to hunting areas elsewhere in the state during designated hunting seasons.

The transport rule was amended in July to specifically allow for a gun to be taken to a range or other residence outside the city. The city unsuccessfully asked the Supreme Court to cancel the arguments and drop the case because the amendment removed the provision being challenged.

The New York State Rifle and Pistol Association filed the lawsuit in 2013 along with three city residents who were told by authorities they could not participate in a shooting competition in New Jersey or bring their guns to a home elsewhere in the state.

The plaintiffs are appealing a 2018 ruling by the Manhattan-based 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that the regulation did not violate the Second Amendment and advanced the city's interest in protecting public safety.

The Supreme Court has avoided taking up a major firearms case since 2010, when it extended to state and local regulations a 2008 ruling that recognized for the first time that the Second Amendment protects a person's right to keep a gun at home for self-defense.

That has left open questions such as whether that right extends outside the home. The challengers also are asking the Supreme Court to require lower courts to more strictly review gun curbs, with an eye toward striking them down.