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WASHINGTON (AP) — Dale Metta, who manages a gun shop just outside the District of Columbia limits in Maryland, has had to turn away dozens of city residents wanting to buy handguns in recent days. Never mind that the U.S. Supreme Court just struck down Washington's 32-year-old ban on possessing handguns.

"I'd like to sell anything I have," said Metta. But he won't just yet — not until the city draws up new regulations.

The Supreme Court's decision June 26 rebuffed the strictest gun law in the nation.

The National Rifle Association called it "a great moment in American history." But prospective gun buyers and sellers said they remain on hold, awaiting the response of D.C. officials who are scrambling to draft new handgun regulations that comply with the court ruling.

"There's nothing we can do until we know what they will do," Metta said.

Metta, manager of Atlantic Guns in Silver Spring, Md., said his store fielded about 75 calls from D.C. residents after the ruling. Other gun shops outside the city — which has no shops of its own — also received calls. They, too, were turning prospective buyers away.

Writing for a 5-4 majority, Justice Antonin Scalia said: "We hold that the District's ban on handgun possession in the home violates the Second Amendment, as does its prohibition against rendering any lawful firearm in the home operable for the purpose of immediate self-defense."

Washington's gun ban took effect in 1976 and essentially outlawed private ownership of handguns in a city struggling with violence.

In 1974, two years before the ban took effect, more than half of all homicides were committed with handguns. But what impact the ban has had on crime has long been debated, particularly after homicides more than doubled during a crack epidemic in the late 1980s and early 90s.

Supporters of the ban lamented the court ruling, but vowed to maintain the strictest handgun measures allowed.

"The Supreme Court's decision last week was regrettable; nonetheless, it is the law of the land," D.C. Council member Phil Mendelson said. He introduced legislation Tuesday to repeal the handgun ban and propose new requirements.

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Besides banning handguns, D.C. law required that rifles and shotguns be kept unloaded and disassembled, or equipped with trigger locks — restrictions Mendelson's bill would still retain. But, bowing to the high court, he offered a broad exemption for guns kept at home for "immediate self-defense."

Gun rights advocates called the bill's wording too narrow, questioning how someone would interpret an immediate need for protection.

"That's a troublesome approach," said John Snyder, of the Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms. He accused the city of trying to make it "as difficult as possible for people to defend themselves."

Mendelson's bill also would require a ballistics record for handguns and a waiting period for registration to be determined by the police chief.

Critics, meanwhile, charged the proposal doesn't address the city's unusual regulation of machine guns, which D.C. defines as weapons that shoot at least 12 rounds without reloading. That restriction applies to many popular semiautomatic firearms.

It remains uncertain how quickly the D.C. Council will move to enact new regulations. Mendelson said, if needed, he will propose emergency action July 15, before the group's summer recess starts.

The city's ban was to remain in effect at least three weeks after the Supreme Court's ruling, until a lower court issues an injunction. Mayor Adrian M. Fenty's administration also is drafting new regulations.

Many are waiting anxiously.

Allan Lucas, a licensed firearms instructor in D.C., is among those concerned about how new regulations will affect him.

He has been trying for two years to open an indoor shooting range in the city to train security guards and other clients. Because the city currently has no zoning category for such a business, he takes his clients to ranges in the suburbs.

"It's pretty ridiculous to think of so many people qualifying to register for firearms and not having a range to practice on," he said.

John McRae, who has lived in Washington for 40 of his 64 years, is among those thinking of buying a gun once the rules are settled. He said he wants to protect himself from armed criminals.

"If they come into my house, I can't use a broomstick," McRae said.

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