

Washington Ballot Summary: Initiative Measure No. 1639



Election Date: November 6, 2018

Ballot Title (what the voter will see on the ballot):

Initiative Measure No. 1639 concerns firearms. This measure would require increased background checks, training, age limitations, and waiting periods for sales or delivery of semiautomatic assault rifles; criminalize noncompliant storage upon unauthorized use; allow fees; and enact other provisions. Should this measure be enacted into law? Yes [] No []

Summary of I-1639:

This measure would require increased background checks, firearm safety training, and waiting periods before semiautomatic assault rifles may be purchased or delivered. It would impose age limitations on who may purchase or possess certain firearms, including prohibiting purchases by persons under age 21. It would require certain secured firearm storage or trigger-locks, and criminalize noncompliant firearm storage if it results in unauthorized use. It would enact other firearm-related requirements, including certain warnings, recordkeeping, and fees.

Immediate Effects, if passed: Initiative 1639 would require background checks in the sale of semiautomatic rifles so that they are similar to what is required for handguns. Individuals wishing to purchase firearms will have to complete a firearm safety training course, and to be at least twenty-one years of age to purchase or possess firearms. It would enact a waiting period for the purchase of semiautomatic rifles, and establish standards for the responsible storage of all firearms.

Fiscal Effects, if passed: Initiative 1639 is intended to be "revenue-neutral." To initiate the process of the purchase of a firearm, purchasers must pay \$25. Overall Washington State tax revenues will be unchanged.

Arguments in favor of the measure:

Supporters of Initiative 1639 argue that the requirements of the initiative will increase public safety because background checks and other provisions will keep these weapons out of the hands of known criminals and people with mental illnesses which affect their impulse control and potential for violence. They cite studies that indicate waiting periods decrease gun homicides, and reduce incidents of suicide and other impulsive acts of violence. They argue further that gun storage would reduce inappropriate access to firearms and so lower youth suicides, gun access to school shooters, and deaths and gun injuries to children under the for age of 6. In addition, they argue that raising the age of ownership to 21 would be in accord with Federal law and the law in at least a dozen states, stating that this is a common step for public safety. They note that the Parkland, Sandy Hook, and Columbine shootings were perpetrated by killers younger than 21 years of age.

Arguments against the measure:

Opponents of this initiative argue that background checks are ineffective because illegal gun dealers do not use them, and the black market will continue unhindered. They argue against waiting periods that assume gun purchasers are mentally ill or have impulse control problems and should therefore have to wait for permission to exercise their constitutional rights. They also argue that waiting periods and gun storage can put people in jeopardy at times of emergency. And they point out that guns can be acquired through a private transfer, negating the need for background checks, waiting periods and age requirements. Opponents point out that at 18 years old, Americans may enlist in the military, so citizens of that age should be able to be entrusted to operate semiautomatic assault rifles.