

(H. B. 1685)

(No. 16-2024)

(Approved January 10, 2024)

AN ACT

To amend Section 2.06 of Act No. 168-2019, as amended, better known as the “Puerto Rico Weapons Act of 2020,” to add a new subsection (c) in order to waive the firearm license application fee for the members of the Puerto Rico Police Bureau Neighborhood Security Councils; and for other related purposes.

STATEMENT OF MOTIVES

This measure seeks to amend Act No. 168-2019, as amended, better known as the “Puerto Rico Weapons Act of 2020,” to waive the firearm license application fee for the members of the Puerto Rico Police Bureau Neighborhood Security Councils. Act No. 20-2017, as amended, known as the “Puerto Rico Department of Public Safety Act,” establishes as public policy that public safety is a right that the State must guarantee to all its inhabitants, citizens, and residents to enable them to exercise their rights freely and safely. Citizens should feel safe and be certain that the State shall use its security forces against any individuals who fail to abide by the rule of law. In addition, citizens should feel confident that their state Government shall be ready and available in an emergency to provide help immediately and efficiently to safeguard their lives, health, family, and property.

The Puerto Rico Police Bureau was created as a government body within the Department of Public Safety under the direct supervision of the Secretary of Public Safety. The duties and responsibilities this Bureau are to protect persons and property, maintain and keep the public order, pursue and procure the fullest protection of the civil rights of the citizens, prevent, discover, investigate, and

persecute crime and, within the scope of its authority, compel obedience with the laws and municipal ordinances, as well as the regulations promulgated thereunder.

It is clear that the State has an unavoidable duty to guarantee the safety of its citizens. In order to achieve these objectives, the State must be dynamic and creative in the fight against crime and use all means available including, but not limited to, exploiting any collaborations that can help it achieve its objective of improving public safety.

The Puerto Rico Police Bureau has been working very closely with the Neighborhood Security Councils for decades. The goal of these Councils is to raise citizens' awareness of their duty to actively participate in their communities so they can help find solutions to their problems and address their needs. This is achieved by identifying and alerting neighbors and the Puerto Rico Police Bureau of any irregular situations that could affect peaceful coexistence.

Neighborhood Councils are defined as a body comprising volunteers who, together with the Puerto Rico Police Bureau, join efforts to find solutions to problems and build the public's trust in the Bureau. The purpose of this is to improve the effectiveness of police efforts in the fight against crime, drugs, and delinquency, among other related matters. They are an organized Community forum in which the prevailing social order and safety matters are discussed. We want to stress that Neighborhood Security Council members receive no compensation whatsoever and collaborate with the Puerto Rico Police Bureau voluntarily at no cost to the State.

Neighborhood Security Councils seek to improve the quality of life of Puerto Rican communities through efficient police services as well as excellent citizen participation and collaboration. They also seek to include citizens as much as possible through police-community action programs and to provide the opportunity to strengthen the family as an institution by searching for alternatives to solve the

public safety-related social issues affecting communities, as well as the development of such institution and Puerto Rico.

In essence, the goal is to raise citizens' awareness of their duty to actively participate in their communities so they can help find solutions to their problems. This is achieved by identifying and alerting neighbors and the Puerto Rico Police Bureau of any irregular situations that could affect everyone's safety. The Councils have been effective at reducing criminal activity, modifying community environments to eliminate areas that are vulnerable to criminal activity, restoring the recreational and civic facilities of their communities for the use and enjoyment of residents, developing relationships between the Puerto Rico Police Bureau and the members of the community through periodic meetings, and developing a community organization educational training program directed at reducing criminal activity in Puerto Rico.

However, the members of the Neighborhood Security Councils are vulnerable to harm due to the work they perform. As a result, there has been a significant decrease in the number of volunteers because they fear for their physical and emotional health as well as their lives. This Legislative Assembly deems it necessary to address the needs of the members of the Neighborhood Security Councils and to discharge its responsibility to provide them with the tools necessary so they can continue to exist and be safe.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF PUERTO RICO:

Section 1.- Section 2.06 of Act No. 168-2019, as amended, known as the "Puerto Rico Weapons Act of 2020," is hereby amended to read as follows:

"Section 2.06.- Persons Exempt from the Payment of Firearms License Fees.

The following persons shall be exempt from the payment of the fees established herein when applying for a Firearms License:

(a) persons with physical disabilities and/or high-performance athletes who represent Puerto Rico internationally in the sport of shooting as certified by the Olympic Committee upon a free consultation with the Shooting Federation; and

(b) those listed in subsections h, i, and j who qualify for the expedited process provided in Section 2.03 of this Act.

(c) the members of the Puerto Rico Police Bureau Neighborhood Security Councils. Provided, that such members meet the requirements of Section 2.02 of this Act for obtaining a firearms license. A firearms license shall be issued to such individuals in their personal capacity and not in their capacity as members of the Puerto Rico Police Bureau Neighborhood Security Councils.

Section 2.- Effectiveness.

This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify to the Secretary of State that the following **Act No. 16-2024 (H. B. 1685)** of the **6th Regular Session** of the **19th Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico**:

AN ACT to amend Section 2.06 of Act No. 168-2019, as amended, better known as the “Puerto Rico Weapons Act of 2020,” to add a new subsection (c) in order to waive the firearm license application fee for the members of the Puerto Rico Police Bureau Neighborhood Security Councils; and for other related purposes.

has been translated from Spanish to English and that the English version is correct.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, on this 3rd day of July, 2024.

Mónica Freire-Florit, Esq.
Director