

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is an Assault Weapon?

Assault weapons are semiautomatic firearms equipped with features that increase their rate of fire, accuracy, and ease of causing mass harm. Designed for combat-like situations rather than typical civilian self-defense, these weapons have been used in many of the nation’s deadliest mass shootings, including Sandy Hook, Uvalde, the 2017 Las Vegas shooting, Orlando’s Pulse nightclub, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

How does Rhode Island regulate Assault Weapons?

In 2025, Rhode Island became the 11th state¹ to restrict certain military-style weapons, including assault-style rifles like the AR-15. However, the law does not cover some assault-style pistols and shotguns and, critically, does not ban possession—making it difficult to enforce, leaving dangerous weapons in circulation, and falling short of neighboring states’ standards. While the Unlawful Sale of Prohibited Firearms Act² is a step toward reducing access, it does not go far enough.

How do we compare to our neighbors?

Rhode Island ³	Connecticut ⁴	Massachusetts ⁵
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Prohibits the purchase and sale of assault rifles as well as any handgun or shotgun with a fixed high-capacity magazine. ✓ Bans the sale of assault rifles based on having one assaultive feature. ✗ Does not ban the possession of these weapons. ✗ Does not ban the sale or possession of assault pistols. ✗ Does not regulate weapons sold or possessed before the law. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Includes assault rifles, pistols, and shotguns. ✓ Bans weapons based on having one assaultive feature. ✓ Prohibits the possession of an assault weapon. ✓ Regulates assault weapons possessed before the ban, including requiring registration of those weapons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Includes assault rifles, pistols, and shotguns. ✓ Bans weapons based on having two assaultive features ✓ Prohibits the possession of an assault weapon. ✓ Regulates weapons possessed before the ban, including requiring registration of those weapons.

¹GIFFORDS
²RI. Gen. Laws §§ 11-47.2.
³RI. Gen. Laws §§ 11-47.2-1-2.
⁴Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 53-202a – 202d.
⁵Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 140 §§ 12I, 131M.

**UNLAWFUL POSSESSION OF
PROHIBITED FIREARMS ACT 2026
H8073 (Tanzi) S2710 (Mack)**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (cont.)

Is the banning of sale *and* possession constitutional?

YES. Bans of assault weapons in other states that include possession, like Massachusetts, have been challenged in federal courts and have passed Constitutional muster.⁶

Does this bill violate the ‘takings clause’ found in the 5th Amendment?

NO. The Supreme Court has held that when the government restricts property to address public safety risks, it is exercising its police power—not taking property for public use—so compensation is not required. While there is always some uncertainty in the courts, existing precedent supports the conclusion that an assault weapons possession ban would not violate the Takings Clause. If the General Assembly chooses to proceed, additional implementation options can be considered during the legislative process to further mitigate that risk.

Which other states regulate the possession of assault weapons?

Nine states: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York have enacted laws that restrict the possession assault weapons.

⁶Worman v. Healey, No. 18-1545 (1st Cir. 2019)

The 2025 law put Rhode Island on a path to banning assault weapons. A ban on possession is the logical next step, ensuring that firearms deemed too dangerous to sell cannot be possessed.