Case 5: Shooting Blind

Since 2011, blind and low vision Iowans can legally buy and possess firearms, unless they are ineligible on federal grounds. Federal guidelines prohibit gun possession if one is addicted to a controlled substance, has been adjudicated as “mentally defective” or has been committed to any mental health institution, is in the country illegally, is under indictment for or has been convicted of a crime punishable by one year or more of imprisonment, has been dishonorably discharged from the military, and so forth. But visual impairment or even blindness is not a reason for restricting ownership of guns. The Iowa law, for instance, SF2379, removed a restriction from a previous law that had required those applying for a permit to have some training on a firing range. That restriction, while not prohibiting those with visual impairment from owning a gun, had had the practical effect of discouraging blind people from applying for a permit. The new law made things easier.

Gun control advocates, like blind musician Stevie Wonder, balk at the idea of blind persons owning guns, especially in light of the growing number of mass shootings in the United States. In a 2013 interview with the CNN host, Piers Morgan, Stevie Wonder said, “I was talking to one of my friends and I said, ‘You know what? You should go get me a gun or me go with you to get a gun and then show how easy it is for me to get a gun. Imagine me with a gun. It’s just crazy.”

On the other hand, disability rights groups such as the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) applaud gun laws like those in Iowa, citing the Americans with Disabilities Act and the moral imperative of equal rights for persons with disabilities. An official statement issued by the NFB in 2013 declared, “Recognizing that laws and regulations regarding the granting of permits to own and/or carry firearms vary throughout our country, our single position on firearms regulation is that a permit to own and/or carry a gun should not be denied to any individual solely on the basis of blindness.”

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