

What are the Differences Between a Class A and a Class B License to Carry a Firearm?

- A Class B license holder may not buy or possess any handgun that is considered “large capacity.” (the state’s definition of “large capacity” does not mean that the person actually owns a handgun with a magazine holding more than 10 rounds of ammunition.) When a police department gives a Class B license is it choosing which handguns a person may own. If the police department trusts the person with handguns, why is the person not to be trusted with a gun that might carry more ammunition? *Chapter 140, §131, paragraph (b)*
- A person with a Class B license is forbidden to carry “concealed and loaded on a public way”. That means the person is denied the right to self-defense outside the home. The penalty is license suspension or revocation, and a fine of \$1,000 to \$10,000. *C. 140, §131, paragraph (b)*
- A person with a Class B license may not transport a loaded handgun in a vehicle, but is required to have the gun unloaded and locked in a case or in the trunk. Once again, the person is denied the ability to use their lawfully owned property for self-defense. The penalty for violation is \$500. *Chapter 140, §131C, paragraph (b)*

The right to self-defense is so fundamental, it is enshrined in Article I of Part the First of the Massachusetts State Constitution. When a police department issues a Class B license to a person who has requested a Class A, they are sending a clear message that the person is not trustworthy, and is a second class citizen.

- The standards in the law, the fee, and the application process are the same for the Class A and the Class B license. A police chief not only has the authority to switch a person’s license class, he or she has the right to deny a license to any person by calling them “unsuitable.”
- Although a person with a Class A license is technically eligible to carry a firearm for protection, he or she may still be denied that elemental right through changes in the “reason for issuance.”

What Is The “Reason For Issuance” On a License To Carry A Firearm?

A Massachusetts license to carry a firearm is issued “subject to such restrictions relative to the possession, use or carrying of firearms as the licensing authority deems proper.” On the back of the license to carry a firearm form is a blank field entitled “reason for issuance.” Most chiefs use this spot to indicate what restrictions they are choosing to place on the user. A license issued without restrictions is issued “for all lawful purposes,” as the law suggests.

The law does not give any definitions of types of restrictions that may be placed on the license. With no clear written guidance, the citizen is left to guess. Thus a citizen that is issued a Class A license for “target and hunting” knows that the chief does not want him or her carrying a gun for protection. But does that mean the license holder must travel with the firearm unloaded and locked in a trunk like a Class B license holder? A person issued a license for “employment only” must wonder whether he or she may carry a firearm on their way to and from work.

The danger for the citizen is the penalty for carrying outside the chief’s wishes, with a penalty of license suspension or revocation, and a fine of \$1,000 to \$10,000.