

# The Mercury News

## Contra Costa supervisors ask state to ban gun shows at fairgrounds

The county will send a letter to the fairground operators

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MARTINEZ — Deciding that gun shows don't belong at the county fairgrounds, the Board of Supervisors unanimously voted Tuesday to ask the state to ban them.

The supervisors will send a letter to the president of the 23rd District Agricultural Association — which owns and operates the fairgrounds and hosts the annual county fair — requesting that the agency consider banning the “possession of firearms and ammunition, including the purchase, sale, and discharge of firearms and ammunition.”

Considering the proliferation of gun violence around the nation, Supervisor Federal Glover said it's important the county “make sure we are doing our part to decrease it.”

The fairgrounds on West 10th Street in Antioch is near a number of what the letter calls “sensitive” uses, including Antioch High School and Fairview Park. There's also a kindergarten-readiness Head Start program facility on fairgrounds property. Other schools in the area include Live Oak High, Antioch Middle and Fremont Elementary.

“As the nation grapples with the effects of mass shootings, the 23rd District Agricultural Association has the responsibility to determine if facilitating gun shows on public property is the message to be sending to the public,” the letter states, adding “Accidental discharge of a firearm is always a risk when handling firearms.”

California has laws regulating gun shows and requiring all firearm transfers at them to be processed through a licensed firearms dealer. Producers of gun shows have to go through a background check and provide a list of the contracted vendors — as well as information about them and their employees — to the Department of Justice. The state also prohibits licensed firearm dealers

from transferring or delivering a firearm to a person within 10 days of their application for the gun or any correction to an application.

While Supervisors Diane Burgis and Candace Andersen did not oppose sending the letter, they questioned the efficacy of banning gun shows. Burgis said she had not heard concerns from the local schools about gun shows at the fairgrounds.

Andersen said she'd like to focus on "getting people to see something, say something" about preventing weapons from getting into the hands of people "who shouldn't have a gun." She pointed to the Sandy Hook Promise program that takes a multi-faceted approach to preventing gun violence, including a "know the signs" campaign that urges people to look for warning signals from those at risk of hurting themselves or others.

She also brought up the possibility of writing to the creators of games and television shows that include violence.

"I don't know that this is going to make a difference in saving lives," Andersen said of the letter. "I think there's more we could do."

Supervisor John Gioia acknowledged that banning gun shows may not do a lot to stem gun violence, but he said it nevertheless is an important message to send. He pointed to other counties that have banned firearms possession and sales on their fairgrounds, including Alameda, Marin, Sonoma, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Los Angeles.

"I think it's a powerful statement," Gioia said, adding that fairs are a family event that often represent the values of a community. "Fairs are often related to the affairs of a county."

Joe Brengle, CEO of the Contra Costa County Fair, said the 23rd District Agricultural Association board had not discussed a gun ban as of Tuesday, having heard about the supervisors' request for the first time on Sunday. Brengle said the board likely would discuss it at the next meeting.

A bill approved by the state Legislature earlier this year that would have banned gun shows at the Cow Palace — which, like the Contra Costa fairgrounds, is owned by the state — was vetoed by Gov. Jerry Brown.

Gioia said during Tuesday's meeting that similar legislation could fare better under newly elected Gov. Gavin Newsom and pointed to that as an option if the agricultural board chooses to not take up a gun ban.

“Maybe it is just symbolic, but it’s messaging,” Glover said, “It’s a piece of property located in Contra Costa County. We have an opportunity; and a portion of the citizenry would like us to step up and lead.”