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Pennsylvania State Senator Pushes for Expansion of State's Castle Doctrine

Pennsylvania State Senator Pat Stefano, a Republican, introduced new legislation on Thursday that would expand castle doctrine in the state.

Castle doctrine is a concept stating that it is acceptable to use lethal force in order to defend yourself from attack in your own home, or "castle." Castle doctrine is similar to the concept of "stand your ground," except that it's typically limited to a citizen's dwelling, automobile, and, in some states, workplaces.

The law was last updated in Pennsylvania in 2011 to extend the right of self-defense to places where a citizen has the right to be if they believe themselves to be in danger of being murdered, kidnapped, severely injured or raped.

Stefano's expansion of the Pennsylvania law would make it acceptable for a citizen to use lethal force to quell an attack beyond the dwelling to the property line.

"Forcing law-abiding Pennsylvanians to wait to defend their loved ones until a criminal enters their home could result in the unnecessary loss of innocent life — a tragedy made worse because it could have been prevented," Stefano said. "The right to defend oneself should not be limited, as it is in the current weaker standard, based on whether individuals are inside their dwelling or on their property."

According to Stefano, the new update to the law would give citizens the ability to "better protect themselves, their family, and their property."

Kim Stolfer, the president of Firearms Owners Against Violent Crime, told KDKA in Pittsburgh that the revision of the law was "absolutely essential" to give Pennsylvanians options in case of violent attack.

"You see what's happening around us in society and you see how police are basically being defunded and thrown to the wayside," Stolfer said. "The collateral damage in all of this, nobody is really taking into account ... the law-abiding citizens are going to be left defenseless or put in harm's way because of it."

"It's so very important to have clarity in the law so that when these dynamic, critical incidents happen and unfold, the people who are involved in them — who are trying to protect themselves — can do it with certainty," Stolfer said.

Anti-gun activists, of course, disagreed.

"Whether your property line is 10 feet from your front door or half a mile away, you would be allowed to shoot and kill someone. If you were worried about your safety, rather than taking the reasonable stance



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of locking your door and calling the police, which will much more likely protect your life and save other people's lives," said Adam Garber, the executive director of CEASEFIRE, PA, an anti-gun group.

Garber and his group believe that the expansion of the new law would lead to more aggressive behavior from citizens who are being attacked.

"But what this does is extend the scope so significantly and that it encourages aggressive behavior and leads to more violence which we've seen in other communities with expanded stand your ground laws."

Certainly, 911 should be called in the event of a home (or property) intrusion, if feasible. But once called, does Garber and his ilk believe that it's the homeowner's responsibility to simply hide and wait for the cavalry?

The very need for "stand your ground" and "castle doctrine" laws is anathema to common sense. That state governments have found the necessity to codify the principle that a citizen has a right to defend himself is a product of a society obsessed with the rights of criminals — not the rights of the individual.

In this case, Stefano's expansion of Pennsylvania's Castle Doctrine is probably necessary, but it's really only a little extra common sense added to a law that shouldn't have to exist.



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