

Gun rights supporters optimistic about ‘constitutional carry’ prospects

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Grass Roots North Carolina president Paul Valone said his group expects action on a constitutional carry firearms law this session. (Clifton Dowell | State Affairs Pro)

A yearslong effort by gun rights groups and their allies in the General Assembly to loosen the state’s concealed carry regulations is a single floor vote away from achieving its goal.

Ahead of the upcoming short session, top supporters of the initiative told NC Insider/State Affairs they are cautiously optimistic that their bill can overcome remaining political hurdles and be enacted into law this year.

North Carolina allows individuals over age 21 to carry a concealed handgun but only



after obtaining a permit from their local sheriff's office. The permits are issued after applicants complete a firearms safety training course and pass a background check.

Under Senate Bill 50 — which was passed by both chambers last year, was vetoed by Gov. Josh Stein and subsequently cleared a veto override vote in the Senate — the permit and training requirements would be removed and the age lowered, allowing any U.S. citizens over age 18 who can otherwise lawfully possess firearms to carry a concealed handgun.

The number of concealed carry permits in North Carolina more than tripled in the 2010s, surging from 177,787 in 2010 to 647,553 in 2019, The Charlotte Observer reported, citing data from the State Bureau of Investigation. If SB 50 is enacted, North Carolina will become the 30th state in the country to allow permitless carry, according to the U.S. Concealed Carry Association headquartered in West Bend, Wisconsin.

The bill's momentum slowed last summer once it reached the House, where, notably, two Republicans joined Democrats in voting against the bill during initial passage. The registered opposition of two House Republicans complicated already difficult math for GOP leadership in a chamber where the majority is one seat shy of a supermajority that can defeat vetoes on its own.

Paul Valone, president of Grass Roots North Carolina, a leading gun rights group, and one of the bill's architects, said in an interview that opposition and reluctance to support the bill among a few House Republicans has made the bill "a tough row to hoe."

His organization has spent months reaching out to supporters across the state to ask them to write to lawmakers who may be on the fence and urge them to vote to defeat Stein's veto, Valone said, adding that he's optimistic Republicans who may have been inclined to sway from the rest of their party and not vote in favor of the bill will support it after hearing from their constituents.

Valone said that one of the House Republicans who voted against the bill in June when it was heading to Stein's desk, Rep. William Brisson, told Valone while running into him at the Legislative Building's Snack Bar soon after the vote last year that he had decided he would vote in favor of overriding Stein's veto should it come back up on the floor again.

Brisson, who announced in December that he will retire at the end of this year after representing Bladen County in the House for 10 terms, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Rep. Ted Davis, a Wilmington Republican who is also retiring at the conclusion of this year's session, also voted against the bill when it passed the House last year.

Valone's organization and other gun rights groups keen to see SB 50 enacted this year have asked supporters to contact GOP Reps. Steve Ross, Jimmy Dixon and Howard Penny and urge them to support the bill in the event it is brought back up for an override vote.

Dixon and Penny both voted in favor of the bill in June while Ross was one of 10 Republicans who had an excused absence during the vote.

Penny's legislative assistant, Grace Rogers, told NC Insider that Penny plans to vote to override Stein's veto of SB 50 if the bill is reconsidered on the floor this year. Dixon and Ross did not respond to requests for comment.



*Rep. Keith Kidwell, R-Beaufort, speaks at a press conference on June 24, 2025.
(Credit: Clifton Dowell)*

Rep. Keith Kidwell, the chairman of the House Freedom Caucus and a leading proponent of removing the concealed carry permit requirement who has filed several bills of his own, said he could not discuss specific lawmakers who may have reservations about the bill.

But he told NC Insider he is “confident that the constituents of the three members who are withholding their votes will make their positions known that they expect this veto override to be upheld.”



“The people — we, the people — want to see this bill get passed and I think that we’re going to see that when we go back up in April,” Kidwell said in an interview.

Valone said that even if Republicans fail to secure the votes to defeat Stein’s veto, he and other longtime backers of the legislation want it to receive a floor vote before the end of this year.

In May 2023, days before crossover, a deadline by which most legislation must pass one chamber in order to be taken up by the other before the end of a two-year session, a similar version of SB 50 quickly started moving through House committees months after it was filed by Kidwell and other Republicans.

The bill initially appeared slated to be taken up by the House during a marathon voting session on crossover day but ended up being pulled. Then-House Speaker Tim Moore told reporters at the time it was dropped because there wasn’t enough support in his caucus. Senate leader Phil Berger, asked about the bill that day, said he didn’t think it was necessary to “delve into additional issues dealing with guns and people’s Second Amendment rights” after the General Assembly had already removed another permit requirement that had been law for a century, this one for the purchase of handguns.

At the start of last year’s long session, Berger indicated his support for the bill by signing on as a sponsor the day it was introduced. Senate Republicans quickly passed the bill and quickly voted to override Stein’s veto after the governor blocked it in June and returned it to lawmakers.

Stein vetoed the bill because, he said, it “makes North Carolinians less safe and undermines responsible gun ownership.”

“Authorizing teenagers to carry a concealed weapon with no training whatsoever is dangerous,” Stein said.

House Speaker Destin Hall, when asked about this bill and others that have similarly cleared override votes in the Senate but are stuck in the lower chamber, has expressed confidence that House Republicans will be able to defeat the remaining vetoes.

Hall and his aides have emphasized that vetoed bills can be taken up at any point before the end of the biennium, and as such, there is plenty of time for leadership to secure adequate support and call votes.



House Speaker Destin Hall jokes with members during a relaxed moment on Feb. 25, 2025. (Credit: Clifton Dowell)

Valone and other supporters of SB 50 met with Hall at his office last year to deliver thousands of petitions urging the General Assembly to pass the bill. During that meeting, Hall told the group that he believed it was “just a matter of time” before the bill, a longstanding priority for gun rights advocates, became law.

Valone said that Hall also pledged to give the bill a recorded veto override vote, anticipating Stein’s opposition.

“Speaker Hall has told us he will bring it to the floor, and I am going to take him up on that,” Valone said.

Kidwell was present during the meeting in question and said he believes Hall is “100% in support of constitutional carry” and will “work his hardest to make sure we do get it across the line.”

Kidwell also said, clarifying that he wasn’t speaking on Hall’s behalf, that he understands Hall’s position to be that the bill will be taken up for an override vote this year.

The House and Senate, during a voting session in July, overrode eight of Stein’s vetoes. In the House, Republicans did so by drawing support from at least one De-



mocrat for each bill to fill the one-seat gap between their caucus and a supermajority. The overridden vetoes included high-profile and contentious measures that mandated increased local law enforcement cooperation with immigration authorities, allowed private schools to arm teachers and volunteers and defined two sexes under state law.

In a social media post a week later, Hall said he was “optimistic” that the House would override the remaining bills that had cleared votes in the Senate but faced a tougher environment in the lower chamber.

Hall said each of the vetoed bills awaiting final override votes in the House would “remain on the calendar until we’re in the position to DELIVER for the people of NC.”

The speaker’s office said that Hall “has said that the House fully intends to override the remaining vetoes that are on the calendar.”

For questions or comments, or to pass along story ideas, please write to Avi Bajpai at abajpai@stateaffairs.com or @AviBajpaiNC on X.