

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

ADAM RICHARDS et al., No. 2:09-cv-01235 MCE-DAD

Plaintiffs,

v.

MEMORANDUM AND ORDER

COUNTY OF YOLO and YOLO COUNTY
SHERIFF ED PRIETO,

Defendants.

-----oo0oo-----

Plaintiffs Adam Richards, Brett Stewart, the Second Amendment Foundation, Inc., and The Calguns Foundation, Inc. (collectively, "Plaintiffs") seek redress from Sheriff Ed Prieto and the County of Yolo (collectively, "Defendants") after Plaintiffs Richards and Stewart were denied gun permits under Yolo County's, and by extension Sheriff Prieto's, concealed weapon licensing policy.

Both Plaintiffs and Defendants have filed Motions for Summary Judgment. A hearing on the matter was held on March 10, 2011. For the reasons set forth below, Plaintiffs' Motion is denied and Defendants' Motion is granted.

1 **BACKGROUND**

2 **A. Concealed Weapon License Policy**

3
4 California law generally prohibits individuals from carrying a
5 concealed firearm in public.¹ See Cal. Penal Code §§ 12025(a)(2),
6 12027. With a permit and for self-defense purposes, one can obtain
7 a license in California to carry a firearm "capable of being
8 concealed upon the person." Penal Code § 12050(a)(1)(A)(i).
9 However, applicants for such a license must provide good cause for
10 applying, and demonstrate they are of "good moral character."
11 Penal Code § 12050(a). Other requirements include a background
12 check and completion of a training course. See id. Beyond these
13 basic requirements, the state grants each municipal or county
14 authority wide latitude to determine both the appropriate criteria
15 for issuing a license and the need to impose any reasonable
16 restrictions on the licensee. Penal Code § 12050(b).

17 ///

18 ///

19 ///

20 ///

21 ///

22 ///

23 ///

24 _____
25 ¹ However, there are a number of exceptions carved out by the
26 statute. For example, nothing prevents a person from carrying a
27 weapon, concealed or otherwise, in their home, place of business or
28 on other designated private property. Penal Code § 12026(a).
There are also a number of designated uses for firearms outside the
scope of Yolo County's policy and lawful under California law, such
as the use of a firearm for hunting or for sport as part of a gun
club. See Penal Code § 12027.

1 Plaintiffs are not challenging the California statute itself², but
2 instead challenge Yolo County's interpretation of their statutory
3 authority, namely its Concealed Weapon License Policy.

4 Consistent with the regulations under California Penal Code,
5 Yolo County and Defendant Prieto, as the Sheriff, have created a
6 policy regulating the issuance of concealed weapon licenses to Yolo
7 County residents. Sheriff Prieto retains "discretion to issue a
8 license to carry a concealed firearm to residents within Yolo
9 County." (See Policy, ECF No. 60-1, at 1.) The policy, accessible
10 to the public, clearly enumerates the criteria for obtaining the
11 license, and an applicant must, among other things, demonstrate
12 that they have a valid reason to request the permit in the first
13 place. (Id.) Examples of valid reasons listed in the policy
14 "include, but are not limited to:" credible threats of violence
15 against the applicant, and being a business owner who carries large
16 sums of cash. (Id. at 1-2.) Examples of invalid reasons include
17 hunting, fishing, or self-defense "without credible threats of
18 violence." (Id. at 2.) The issuance of a license ultimately bears
19 on whether the "Sheriff or his designee feels there is sufficient
20 reason to grant the license." (Id.)

21 ///

22
23 ² The State of California and/or its legislature is not a party to
24 the action. Plaintiffs appear to be challenging Defendants'
25 exercise of state law at the local level. (See e.g. Sec. Am.
26 Compl., ECF No. 48 (hereinafter, "SAC").) However, Yolo County's
27 policy derives its authority from the legislature's framework, and
28 there is substantial overlap between the policy and California law.
In addition, Plaintiffs' Motion for Summary Judgment specifically
challenges portions of California's Penal Code. (ECF No. 54-1 at
21.) Recognizing the close overlap, this Court interprets
Plaintiffs' arguments as those ultimately against Defendants, and
not the state legislature or, by extension, the California Penal
Code.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

B. Plaintiffs

Plaintiffs Second Amendment Foundation, Inc. and The Calguns Foundation, Inc. are non-profit organizations designed to promote the rights of firearm holders, and more generally anti-gun control advocates. (SAC 2.) Both Plaintiffs Richards and Stewart are members and supporters of both organizations. (Id. at 1.)

In March 2009, Plaintiff Richards contacted the Yolo County Sheriff's office to inquire about the procedure to obtain a permit to carry a handgun. Defendant was told that he could not obtain a concealed weapon license for self-defense purposes because that would not constitute good cause under the terms of the policy. (Id. at 4.) In addition, since Plaintiff Richards resides in Davis, the Yolo County Sheriff's office informed him that he would first have to apply for a concealed weapon license from the Chief of Police in the City of Davis. (Id.)

Similarly, in March 2010, Plaintiff Stewart applied for a concealed weapon license from Yolo County, after first being told that Davis police had discontinued issuing Carry Concealed Weapon permits. (Id. at 5.) On April 27, 2010, Plaintiff Stewart was informed in writing that he was being denied a permit by Yolo County because his application did not "'meet the criteria'" for granting a license, as outlined in the policy. (Id.)

///
///
///
///
///

1 In judging evidence at the summary judgment stage, the court does
2 not make credibility determinations or weigh conflicting evidence.
3 See T.W. Elec. v. Pacific Elec. Contractors Ass'n, 809 F.2d 626,
4 630-631 (9th Cir. 1987) (citing Matsushita Elec. Indus. Co., Ltd.
5 v. Zenith Radio Corp., 475 U.S. 574, 587 (1986)).

6
7 **ANALYSIS**

8 **A. Second Amendment**

9 **1. Heller and the Scope of Protection**

10
11 Plaintiffs argue that, by maintaining a policy that deprives
12 Plaintiffs Richards and Stewart of a concealed weapon license,
13 Defendants are infringing on their Second Amendment right to bear
14 arms, as the Yolo County license policy effectively acts as a
15 complete ban on an individual's right to carry. They challenge the
16 policy both on its face, and as applied. (See Mot. Summ. J. Hr'g
17 Tr. 9:15-17, March 10, 2011, ECF No. 70.) Defendants, on the other
18 hand, believe that the Second Amendment has never been interpreted
19 as granting citizens the right to carry a concealed weapon in
20 public, and restrictions on firearm possession has been the status
21 quo in the United States for many years. Further, Defendants
22 contend that Yolo County's policy does not violate the Second
23 Amendment, because it is not a total ban on the possession of
24 handguns.

25 ///

26 ///

27 ///

28 ///

1 The Second Amendment protects an individual's right to "keep
2 and bear arms." U.S. Const. amend. II. Rights bestowed under the
3 Second Amendment are "fundamental," and apply "equally to the
4 Federal Government and the States." McDonald v. City of Chicago,
5 130 S. Ct. 3020, 3050 (2010). Specifically, the Second Amendment
6 "protects a personal right to keep and bear arms for lawful
7 purposes, most notably for self-defense in the home." McDonald,
8 130 S. Ct. at 3044. See also United States v. Heller, 554 U.S.
9 570, 635 (2008) ("the District's ban on handgun possession in the
10 home [for self-defense purposes] violates the Second Amendment.");
11 United States v. Vongxay, 594 F.3d 1111, 1115 (9th Cir. 2010)
12 (explaining the scope of Heller was limited to the right to
13 register and keep a loaded firearm in the home for self-defense).

14 However, as the Supreme Court of the United States recently
15 clarified in a landmark case, the "right secured by the Second
16 Amendment is not unlimited. From Blackstone through the 19th-
17 century cases, commentators and courts routinely explained that the
18 right was not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in
19 any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose." Heller, 554 U.S.
20 at 626. In fact, the Court was careful to explain that their
21 decision did not, in any way, invalidate many of the longstanding
22 state and federal prohibitions on firearm possession.

23 ///

24 ///

25 ///

26 ///

27 ///

28 ///

1 Id. at 627.⁴ Based upon this, Heller cannot be read to invalidate
2 Yolo County's concealed weapon policy, as the Second Amendment does
3 not create a fundamental right to carry a concealed weapon in
4 public.

5 Furthermore, the policy does not create a total ban on
6 carrying a firearm, such that the policy completely infringes on
7 the rights protected by the Second Amendment. Since the Supreme
8 Court has yet to articulate the appropriate standard of review, the
9 Ninth Circuit has determined that only regulations that
10 "substantially burden the right to keep and bear arms trigger
11 heightened scrutiny under the Second Amendment." Nordyke v. King,
12 No. 07-15763, 2011 WL 1632063, at *6 (9th Cir. May 2, 2011)
13 (evaluating whether a restriction on gun sales substantially
14 burdens Second Amendment rights). It then follows that if the
15 regulation does not place a substantial burden to an individual's
16 fundamental right, then rational basis review applies.

17 ///

19 ⁴Plaintiffs' implicit argument is that Heller stands for the
20 general right to carry a concealed weapon for self-defense purposes
21 in public. (See Hr'g Tr. 23:9-13 ("There is a right to keep and
22 bear arms. Bear arms means to carry them in public.") The
23 Supreme Court does explain that the historical inference of the
24 word "bear" should be interpreted to mean that there is a right to
25 carry "upon the person or in the clothing or in a pocket" a "weapon
26 for a particular purpose - confrontation." Id. at 584-85.
27 However, Heller's ultimate holding is not the Court's
28 interpretation of the historical significance of the Second
Amendment's language. To the contrary, the Court, both in Heller,
and subsequently in McDonald, took painstaking effort to clearly
enumerate that the scope of Heller extends only to the right to
keep a firearm in the home for self-defense purposes. See supra
(emphasis added). This Court does not infer that Heller grants any
right that "extends beyond the home," as Plaintiffs contended
during oral argument. (Hr'g Tr. 11:8-10.) Courts "often limit the
scope of their holdings, as such limitations are integral" to
understanding the holdings' reach. Vongxay, 594 F.3d at 1115.

1 Id. at *6 (In "a variety of contexts" the Supreme Court "applies
2 mere rational basis scrutiny to laws that regulate, but do not
3 significantly burden, fundamental rights.").⁵

4 In determining whether government action "substantially
5 burdens" a constitutionally-protected right, courts "typically ask
6 whether the restriction leaves open sufficient alternative avenues"
7 for exercising the right. Id. at *7-8. The appropriate inquiry
8 here, under a substantial burden analysis, is whether Yolo County's
9 restrictions leave Plaintiffs with "reasonable alternative means"
10 to obtain and keep a firearm "sufficient for self-defense
11 purposes." Id. at *7.

12 California Penal Code has carved out a number of exceptions
13 that allow individuals to possess and carry loaded firearms in
14 public settings, including for use in hunting, or in a situation
15 where someone who believes they are in "immediate, grave, danger
16 and that the carrying of the weapon is necessary for the
17 preservation of that person or property." Penal Code
18 § 12031(j)(1).⁶

19 _____
20 ⁵ In their Summary Judgment Motion, Plaintiffs interpret Heller to
21 mean that rational basis review could not, under any circumstances,
22 be used to evaluate the merits of a policy regulating portions of
23 the Second Amendment. (ECF No. 54-1 at 26.) Indeed, the Ninth
24 Circuit previously interpreted Heller the same way; namely that
25 rational-basis scrutiny would not be appropriate to review Second
26 Amendment restrictions. See Vongxay, 594 F.3d at 1118 n.5.
27 However, earlier this month, the Ninth Circuit read Heller as
28 "insisting that a Second Amendment backed only by rational basis
review would have 'no effect,'" and heightened scrutiny is only
appropriate for claims that substantially burden the right to bear
and keep arms. Nordyke, 2011 WL 1632063, at *10 (citing Heller,
554 U.S. at 627 n.27) (emphasis added).

⁶ Immediate is defined as "the brief interval before and after the
local law enforcement agency, when reasonably possible, has been
notified of the danger and before the arrival of its assistance."
Id.

1 A regulation or policy "does not substantially burden a
2 constitutional right simply because it makes the right...more
3 difficult to exercise." Nordyke, 2011 WL 1632063, at *8.

4 Under the statutory scheme, even if Plaintiffs are denied a
5 concealed weapon license for self-defense purposes from Yolo
6 County, they are still more than free to keep an unloaded weapon
7 nearby their person, load it, and use it for self-defense in
8 circumstances that may occur in a public setting. Yolo County's
9 policy does not substantially burden Plaintiffs' right to bear and
10 keep arms. Therefore, rational basis review applies.

11 A regulation is constitutional under rational basis review if
12 it bears "a reasonable relationship to a legitimate government
13 interest." United States v. Whitlock, 2011 WL 1651232, at *5 (9th
14 Cir. April 28, 2011) (citing United States v. LeMay, 260 F.3d 1018,
15 1031 (9th Cir. 2001)). As Defendants contend, regulating concealed
16 firearms is an essential part of Yolo County's efforts to maintain
17 public safety and prevent both gun-related crime and, most
18 importantly, the death of its citizens. Yolo County's policy is
19 more than rationally related to these legitimate government goals,
20 and Plaintiffs' Motion for Summary Judgment fails as to this
21 portion of their argument.

22 ///

23 ///

24 ///

25 ///

26 ///

27 ///

28 ///

1 **2. Defendants' "Good Cause" Discretion**

2
3 Plaintiffs also assert that the portions of Yolo County's
4 concealed weapon license policy evaluating an applicant's good
5 moral character and good cause for seeking a permit, gives the
6 government "unbridled discretion" in violation of the Second
7 Amendment. In applying traditional First Amendment analysis,
8 Plaintiffs contend the statute is a prior restraint on the freedom
9 to keep and bear arms. Defendants, in turn, believe any analogy of
10 the Second Amendment to the First is improper because it "ignores
11 the fundamental difference between regulation of speech and guns."
12 (Def's. Mot. for Summ. J. 24, ECF No. 59.)

13 In a facial challenge⁷ to a statute outside of the First
14 Amendment context, a plaintiff must demonstrate that "no set of
15 circumstances exists under which" the statute would be valid, "i.e.
16 that the law is unconstitutional in all of its applications."
17 Wash. State Grange v. Wash. State Republican Party, 552 U.S. 442,
18 450 (2008). See also Hotel & Motel Ass'n. of Oakland v. City of
19 Oakland, 344 F.3d 959, 971 (9th Cir. 2003) ("To bring a successful
20 facial challenge outside the context of the First Amendment, the
21 challenger must establish that no set of circumstances exists under
22 which the statute would be valid." (internal citations omitted));
23 Nordyke, 2011 WL 1632063, at *7 n.11 ("A facial challenge" is "the
24 most difficult challenge to mount successfully.").

25
26 ⁷ Plaintiffs characterized this portion of their argument as a
27 "facial challenge" during oral argument, and the pleadings support
28 such an interpretation. (See Hr'g Tr. 9:15-10:8) An as-applied
constitutional challenge to Yolo County's policy was not asserted
under the analogous First Amendment analysis.

1 Courts are instructed to first determine whether "the
2 enactment reaches a substantial amount of constitutionally
3 protected conduct" by examining "the ambiguous as well as the
4 unambiguous scope of the enactment." Village of Hoffman Estates v.
5 Flipside, Hoffman Estates, Inc., 455 U.S. 489, 494 & n.6 (1982).
6 Such an inquiry must be "examined in the light of the facts of the
7 case at hand," which should ultimately demonstrate that the
8 regulation is patently invalid because "no standard of conduct is
9 specified at all." Id. at 495 n.7 (internal citations omitted).

10 An exception to the rigidity of the facial challenge test
11 exists for issues involving the First Amendment. A law involving
12 First Amendment protections "may be overturned as impermissibly
13 broad because a substantial number of its applications are
14 unconstitutional, judged in relation to the statute's plainly
15 legitimate sweep." Wash. State Grange, 552 U.S. at 449 n.6
16 (internal citations omitted). Plaintiffs suggest the Court turn to
17 case precedent established from examining the rights and
18 regulations carved from the First Amendment as a framework for
19 assessing those rights indicated under the Second Amendment.
20 However, Plaintiffs do not address the exception in their papers,
21 but cite cases entrenched in First Amendment constitutional
22 analysis. The Court sees no reason to analogize rights under the
23 Second Amendment to those under the First, as plenty of case
24 authority exists to provide a clear framework of analysis to facial
25 challenges, without poaching precedent from another Amendment's
26 framework.

27 ///

28 ///

1 Therefore, this Court cannot invalidate the good cause and
2 good moral character portions of Yolo County's policy as
3 unconstitutional on their face. Plaintiffs cannot demonstrate that
4 there are zero circumstances under which Sheriff Prieto could
5 clearly issue a concealed weapon permit to someone who demonstrates
6 plausible good cause under the terms of the policy, and is also of
7 objective good moral character. Any inquiry into the facial
8 constitutionality of Yolo County's policy is futile, for it is both
9 "undesirable" and near impossible for the Court to "consider every
10 conceivable situation which might possibly arise in the application
11 of complex and comprehensive legislation." Gonzales v. Carhart,
12 550 U.S. 124, 168 (2007) (internal citations omitted); Nordyke,
13 2011 WL 1632063 at *7. Facial challenges are also disfavored for
14 many reasons, most notably because they "rest on speculation."
15 Wash. State Grange, 552 U.S. at 450.

16 Moreover, Yolo County's policy does contain a standard of
17 conduct; applicants are clearly instructed to be of good moral
18 character (and submit application documents corroborating such
19 character), and demonstrate good cause for requiring the license.
20 The policy goes further by providing examples of the types of good
21 cause that satisfy the terms of the policy. While Plaintiffs are
22 entitled to dislike the qualifications and standards created by
23 Sheriff Prieto and Yolo County's policy, they cannot demonstrate
24 that the policy itself is void for facial vagueness. For each of
25 the above reasons, Plaintiffs' Motion for Summary Judgment on the
26 Second Amendment claim fails and Defendants' Motion for Summary
27 Judgment is granted.

28 ///

1 **B. Equal Protection**

2
3 Plaintiffs insist that Yolo County's concealed weapon license
4 policy is subjective because Sheriff Prieto has discretionary
5 authority to determine what constitutes "good cause." Plaintiffs
6 also believe the policy is arbitrary and violates Equal Protection
7 because some individuals are granted the right to bear arms for
8 self-defense, while others are not. Defendants maintain that Yolo
9 County's interest in preventing crime and ensuring public safety
10 merits the policy's language and renders it constitutional.

11 The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment
12 requires that all "persons similarly situated" be treated the same
13 under the law. City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Center, Inc.,
14 473 U.S. 432, 439 (1985); Freeman v. City of Santa Ana, 68 F.3d
15 1180, 1187 (1995). Modern equal protection analysis is a two step
16 process: the first step is identifying the classification of
17 groups, namely that a law is "applied in a discriminatory manner or
18 imposes different burdens on different classes of people." Id.

19 The second step requires the court to "assess the legitimacy
20 of a discriminatory statute under the appropriate level of
21 scrutiny." Sagana v. Tenorio, 384 F.3d 731, 740 (9th Cir. 2004).

22 ///
23 ///
24 ///
25 ///
26 ///
27 ///
28 ///

1 Where an ordinance does not "purposefully operate to the detriment
2 of a suspect class, the only requirement of equal protection is
3 that the ordinance be rationally related to a legitimate
4 governmental interest. Nordyke, 2011 WL 1632063, at *14 (internal
5 citations omitted).⁸

6 Plaintiffs' equal protection claim fails for two reasons.
7 First, the policy does not treat similarly situated individuals
8 differently. All law-abiding citizens who apply for a permit are
9 not the same because some can demonstrate they have good cause and
10 are of good moral character, and some cannot. Second, Defendants'
11 good cause and good character clauses in the policy are clearly
12 rationally related to Yolo County's goals of reducing the incidence
13 of unlawful public shootings, prevent police from safely responding
14 to dangerous situations, generally preventing crime, and ensuring
15 public safety.

16 17 **CONCLUSION** 18


19 Compared to many of this country's constitutional protections,
20 the scope of rights under the Second Amendment is ambiguous and no
21 doubt subject to change and evolution over time. Nonetheless, even
22 in light of Heller and McDonald, Yolo County's concealed license
23 policy is constitutionally valid.

24 _____
25 ⁸ Though the right to keep and bear arms for self-defense is a
26 fundamental right, "that right is more appropriately analyzed under
27 the Second Amendment. Id. (citing Albright v. Oliver, 510 U.S.
28 266, 273 (1994) ("Where a particular amendment provides an explicit
textual source of constitutional protection against a particular
sort of government behavior, that Amendment, not the more
generalized notion of substantive due process, must be the guide
for analyzing those claims." (internal citations omitted))).

1 Plaintiffs' Motion for Summary Judgment (ECF No. 54) is DENIED.
2 Defendants' Cross Motion for Summary Judgment (ECF No. 58) is
3 GRANTED. The Clerk of Court is accordingly directed to enter
4 judgment in favor of Defendants Yolo County and Yolo County Sheriff
5 Ed Prieto.

6 IT IS SO ORDERED.

7 Dated: May 13, 2011

8 
9 _____
10 MORRISON C. ENGLAND, JR.
11 UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28