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D.C. Politics

Security, not street crime, at risk after gun ruling, D.C. Police Chief Cathy Lanier says

D.C. Chief of Police Cathy L. Lanier shown June 11 at the 9th annual Law Enforcement Awards Ceremony in Washington, D.C. (Sarah L. Voisin/The Washington Post)

By **Mike DeBonis** July 30 at 7:06 PM [Follow @mikedebonis](#)

A federal judge’s decision to [strike down the District’s ban](#) on carrying guns in public could have dramatic implications for the security of dignitaries and the safety of high-profile events, the city’s police chief said Wednesday.

In her most detailed comments [since the ruling Saturday](#), Police Chief Cathy L. Lanier called for “reasonable

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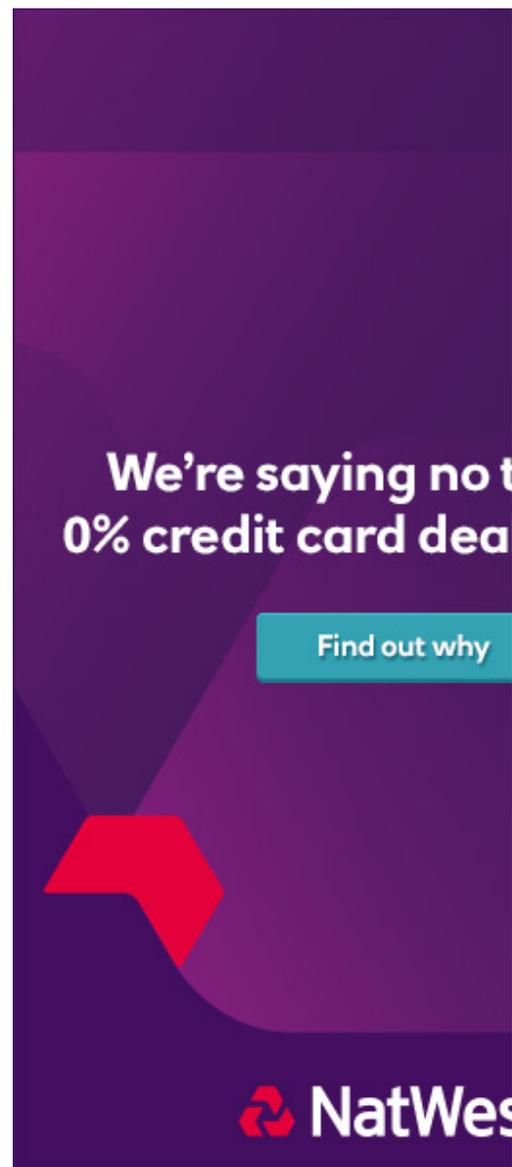
provisions” restricting the public from bearing arms in sensitive locations at sensitive times. Otherwise, she said, the decision would have a relatively minimal impact on street crime or her department’s ability to police neighborhoods and lock up dangerous criminals who are found carrying guns.

“Law-abiding citizens that register firearms, that follow the rules, are not our worry,” she said. “Our worry really is, how do we maintain the level of security in the nation’s capital that we’re required to maintain 24 hours a day in the areas that we’re required to maintain that security?”

The ruling by Senior U.S. District Judge Frederick J. Scullin Jr. was stayed, or put [on hold, until late October](#) while city leaders determine how to comply with his finding that the city’s flat ban on the carrying of weapons by people who are not law enforcement officials violates the Second Amendment to the Constitution.

Lanier made note of major public events such as the Fourth of July celebrations on the Mall and next week’s U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, which is expected to attract dozens of world leaders, as places where gun carrying should be tightly restricted.

“There are a lot of big things like that, that we really need to think through what provisions are going to be valuable to us that are unique to Washington, D.C.,” she said. “Of



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all of my concerns, my biggest concern is, how do we designate what are the sensitive things that we need to provide security for?”

Mayor Vincent C. Gray (D) and a top aide to D.C. Attorney General Irvin B. Nathan said Wednesday that those efforts are on a dual track as officials consider whether to lodge an appeal and also how best to modify city law to comport with Scullin’s ruling.

Scullin granted a 90-day stay of his ruling Tuesday. The city has asked for a longer delay to continue until any appeals are resolved; Scullin has asked for further argument before ruling on the request.

Alan Gura, an attorney for the several gun owners and nonprofit group that challenged the ban, said it was “refreshing to hear” that Lanier does not consider law-abiding gun owners a threat. He also said the District should be able to strike an appropriate balance between security needs and Second Amendment rights.

“Appropriate time, place and manner restrictions are constitutional, but that does not mean that the entire District is a ‘sensitive place,’ ” as the city has argued in court, Gura said.

Ariel Levinson-Waldman, Nathan’s senior counsel, said that the decision to appeal is under review but that officials also plan to “explore ways to make sure that our

D.C. mayor signs bill banning plastic foam food and drink containers for carryout use

carry laws continue to be strong . . . but may perhaps be drawn back from an absolute ban.”

“We are the seat of the federal government,” he said, echoing arguments that city lawyers have made in court. “We have dignitaries and other federal officials who are subject to constant death threats. We have had actual assassinations and assassination attempts using firearms in this city. We are a unique place, and so there is a very serious and open question about whether our ban is fully valid.”

Lanier, speaking with the other officials during a mayoral event at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, said fears were overstated that the end of the carry ban would impede everyday policing by putting thousands of additional guns on the street. Lanier also played down concerns that dangerous criminals could go free if officers cannot detain and charge them for carrying a weapon in public. Criminals, she said, typically do not possess properly registered firearms, meaning they can be charged under other laws not challenged by Scullin’s ruling.

Delroy Burton, head of the D.C. police union, said this week that if civilians are allowed to carry guns, “the mind-set of officers has to change for how we have to deal with that.” But Lanier said Wednesday that is “not a big shift.”

“We deal with concealed carry every single day in this city, I don’t care what anybody tells you,” she said, citing the large number of plainclothes local and federal law enforcement officers. “Legal guns, legally carried, there’s hundreds of them out there in this city every single day. . . . That’s not a big training gap for us.”

She also disputed claims that allowing the public to carry weapons would have a significant impact on street crime, citing her experience after the Supreme Court decision, *District of Columbia v. Heller*, that struck down the city’s long-standing handgun ban.

“When Heller came out in 2008, people said, ‘Oh, street crime’s going to go down.’ Well, Heller only allows you to have a handgun in your home, and guess what happened? Burglaries went up. So I don’t know that there’s any valid debate on the crime side. My one focus, really, now is going to be security of our dignitaries in those really highly sensitive large events.”

Peter Hermann contributed to this report.

Mike DeBonis covers local politics and government for The Washington Post. He also writes a blog and a political analysis column that runs on Fridays.
