

Rochelle News-Leader

New Illinois gun laws crack down on repeat offenders

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SPRINGFIELD — In response to the epidemic of gun violence in Chicago, Illinois lawmakers passed a new law coming into effect next week that some say will help crack down on repeat gun offenders. Reform advocates argue that they're missing the point.

Gov. Bruce Rauner signed into law new mandatory minimum sentences for people arrested more than once for gun crimes. The bill is seen as Springfield's answer to rampant gun violence plaguing Chicago's south and west sides. The new law requires at least seven years in prison for repeat gun offenders instead of three.

Republican Minority Leader Jim Durkin sponsored the bill. He admitted that it would not solve the problem, but it was a start.

"This is the start of something to stop this plague of violence which we pick up and read in the newspaper on a daily basis," he said in June.

But Clark Neily, CATO Institute vice president of criminal justice, said putting more people behind bars for a longer period of time is not a move in the right direction.

"All you're doing is locking people up for much longer periods of time," he said. "It's very costly and has a terrible effect on their lives as well as their families and the people who depend on them."

The best cure for crime, Neily said, is gainful employment.

"When people have work that they find meaningful, then they truly feel that they're part of something," he said.

Illinois has the highest unemployment rate in the Midwest and the highest black unemployment rate in the nation.

More than 3,500 people were shot in Chicago this year with over 600 dying.