

New Hampshire State Rep. Jenn Coffey is also an EMT. One of her favorite knives is a Kershaw Rainbow Leek, a gift from a friend. "It has a rainbow of colors that dance in the sunlight," she writes. "It is thin, sleek and built for a woman's hand—my hand." (photo courtesy of Jenn Coffey)



KNIVES, LIPSTICK AND LIBERTY



If her pro-knife law passes, New Hampshire Rep. Jenn Coffey—who is also an EMT—said the Benchmade 9051/9052 AFO II will be at the top of her to-get list. “It has the one-button open so I can keep one hand on my patient if I need to, and I think that makes it safer for me as well,” she opined. “I’m less likely to cut myself opening the knife in an emergency situation.” (Benchmade photo)

REP. JENN COFFEY TALKS HER PRO-KNIFE BILL, FAVORITE KNIVES AND MORE

Knives, lipstick and liberty—sounds like a strange combination, doesn’t it? The fact is they go very well together. A woman’s knife rights are just as important as her gun rights. Women are often more familiar with knives because they have been around them ever since they were kids. They are more comfortable with knives in the home, for self-defense and on the job than with other tools. I have many knives and one of my favorites, a Kershaw Rainbow Leek, was a gift from a friend; it’s beautiful. It has a rainbow of colors that dance in the sunlight. It is thin, sleek and built for a woman’s hand—my hand.

My first time using a knife was in the kitchen helping my grandma prepare a meal. How proud I was to be trusted to cut up the cucumbers for the evening salad and being treated like a “big girl.” Thankfully, more and more knife manufacturers see the link and have created knives made just for women. The knives have everything from great colors, to smaller handles and ease of use, to even supporting women’s causes like breast cancer awareness, something I care a great deal about.

The problems occur when you live in a state, like mine, that does not allow you to have those useful tools. I reside in New Hampshire and am an EMT. My state has a ban on certain knives. You see, my state, like some other jurisdictions, fails to separate the tools used by honest

citizens from the actions committed by criminals. This is due to a New Hampshire law passed in 1955 banning sword canes, gun canes, “switch knives” (the law does not call them switchblades), stiletos, daggers, dirks—the list goes on. In 1992, sword canes and gun canes were removed from the knife ban but the rest of the ban remained. As an EMT, I know there are some great knives and other products out there that can help me save lives. Whether it is cutting someone out of a seatbelt or breaking through glass to rescue someone trapped in a vehicle, the tools exist.

The irony is that the safest knives lock both open and closed, and they are quick and easy to use. They are legal for me to have while I am on duty. However, I cannot carry one to work or home when I am off duty! I could, in fact, face a 12-month jail sentence just for having a knife in my gear. The same is true for fishermen, hunters, military personnel and firefighters. As a result, basically any lawful use of these knives is impossible, unless you have *Star Trek* technology and can teleport them from home to work and back again without carrying them on your person or in your vehicle. What’s more, you cannot buy such knives in this state; that is illegal, too. It is an absurd New Hampshire law that needs to be removed from the books.

Some women who want to protect themselves are not comfortable carrying a gun but want something more effective than pepper spray. Some prefer to carry something that is familiar, something they have used since their youth, like a knife. Also, having a knife as backup to a firearm is a must for some of us who have been practicing personal protection as a way of life. For others who are new to defending themselves, knives are often the tools they start with; they may later consider a firearm when they are comfortable with the idea. The bottom line is this: Being able to protect yourself is the birthright of every man and woman. It is necessary to our liberty. If you live in New Hampshire right now, you are at risk of becoming a criminal while trying to stop a criminal from victimizing you. Go figure.

Ban Bad Behavior, Not Blades

In September 2009, prominent Second Amendment leaders from around the country gathered in St. Louis for the Gun Rights Policy Conference. There, Jeff Knox, director of operations for the Fire-

arms Coalition, introduced “Resolution 6.” The resolution was overwhelmingly supported by a unanimous vote. The resolution declares: “We support the repeal of the Federal Switchblade Act and any other federal, state or local laws and regulations banning tools and weapons rather than addressing behavior.”

As an elected state representative and in keeping with the spirit of Resolution 6, I have introduced a bill in the New Hampshire House to address the problem. I am proud to say I have bipartisan co-sponsors who support knife rights. Joining me are New Hampshire representatives Jasper, Eaton, Welch and Winters, plus state senator Letourneau. The bill protects honest citizens and puts the burden of law back on the criminal where it belongs.

The idea for the bill comes from legislation passed in 1992 that ended the ban on gun canes and sword canes, and created the enhanced criminal penalty. I want to end the 1955 state ban on “switch knives,” stiletos, daggers and dirks. I realized this needed to be done while looking over New Hampshire knife laws and applauding the recent federal knife law victory (see pages 10 and 46, March *BLADE*®).

The federal reform was a huge win, but I believe it is only the beginning of changing the laws around the nation and the perceptions that some people have of knives in general. The Second Amendment is not just about firearms, as made clear by steadfast Second Amendment defender Alan Gottlieb, chairman of the Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms (CCRKBA).

“Over the years, there have been many instances of women and men using knives to protect themselves,” he said. “There’s no doubt in my mind that the right to keep and bear arms includes knives. The Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms supports this bill.”

Knife rights organizations such as Knife Rights, Inc., support my efforts. Commented Doug Ritter, chairman of Knife Rights: “Rep. Coffey’s bill removes the prohibition on these knives and focuses the law on criminal use of the knives. Knife Rights supports efforts that remove restrictions on ownership, carry and legitimate use of knives as tools and arms, and recognizes that it’s the criminal use of knives that should garner the law’s attention.”

Joining Knife Rights is the American



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Knife & Tool Institute (AKTI).

"One of the premier goals of AKTI is the clarification and/or removal of vague and ambiguous language involving knives from both state and federal statutes," observed Buck Knives' CJ Buck, who is also a member of the AKTI board of regents. "AKTI is in full support of Rep. Coffey's bill, as it is removing terminology from New Hampshire statutes that was far too open to misinterpretation."

These organizations and many others are applauding our efforts in New Hampshire. When my bill passes, 1.3 million New Hampshire citizens will not have to fear not having their trusty tool while hunting, fishing, coming home from military duty, working, traveling, fighting fires, saving lives, or protecting themselves.

"Benchmade supports Rep Coffey's efforts," added Les de Asis, Benchmade CEO. "Professionals and sportsmen alike rely on edged tools, no matter the size or opening mechanism, to get the job done day in and day out. We recognize and support their need to own and use these products."

When my bill becomes law, the state's citizens will be able to use, carry, buy, sell and trade these tools. On the other hand, criminals who use a knife to harm someone with the intention of committing a crime will have a reason to fear, as the bill includes an enhanced penalty for them.

I am a firm believer in liberty, but liberty

Coffey's Cutters

"I always have my Sheffield knife on me," New Hampshire representative and EMT Jenn Coffey began. "I keep an NRA knife that was a gift in my car, and we have a seatbelt cutter in the ambulance. The knife I want is a Benchmade 9051/9052 AFO II [see pages 78-79]. It locks open, has a window break on the end and the knife itself can cut a seatbelt. Plus, it has the one-button open so I can keep one hand on my patient if I need to, and I think that makes it safer for me as well. I'm less likely to cut myself opening the knife in an emergency situation. I can't risk having it because of the current [New Hampshire] law.

"Ultimately I would like to find a knife that does all of the above but has an added seatbelt-cutter hook in addition to the blade, and the rest of the features and doesn't have a huge grip. I haven't seen one as of yet."



Rep. Coffey poses with a flag bearing the words "Don't Tread On Me," which was the motto of the first flag of the American Revolution. (photo courtesy of Jenn Coffey)

ends where it threatens honest citizens. Others, such as Aaron Zelman, executive director of Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership (JPFO) and a prominent Bill of Rightist, see it the same way. "Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership opposes laws that make it difficult for people to exercise their God-given right to protect their life and that of others," Zelman said. "JPFO supports this bill."

In addition to the aforementioned individuals, the following have all joined me in the effort to reform New Hampshire's knife laws: Steve Shackelford and Ben Sobieck of *BLADE*, Roy Huntington (*American Handgunner*), Grover Norquist, Mark McMorrow, Frank Trzaska, Al Kulas and Mark Zalesky (*Knife World*). This group knows the importance of knife rights to the Second Amendment and is proudly supporting my efforts to reform antiquated knife laws. They appreciate the nationwide effect it should have on other states, to distinguish between honest citizens and criminals. To see for yourself what all these great people have to say, visit www.knifelawonline.com and click on "What People are Saying."

Spirit of Resolution 6

Women can make the difference. In keeping with the spirit of Resolution 6, the Constitution and the liberty movement, I am doing my part. The more lips with lipstick speaking about knife rights, the more liberty we all will have.

In addition to being a New Hampshire state representative and an EMT, the author is also the national coordinator and a board member of Second Amendment Sisters, Inc. You can contact her by visiting www.jenncoffey.com.

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