Before Friday's horrific school shooting in Connecticut, people on both sides of the concealed-carry debate were saying privately that they did not expect Attorney General Lisa Madigan to appeal her major loss at the hands of the U.S. Court of Appeals.

A Seventh Circuit panel in Chicago voted 2-1 on December 11 to declare Illinois' strict laws on carrying guns unconstitutional and gave the General Assembly 180 days to come up with a new, much less restrictive law.

"A right to bear arms ... implies a right to carry a loaded gun outside the home," the majority opinion decreed, saying that Illinois had failed to show that restrictions on gun owners – including bans on concealed carry – had any positive effect.

Appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court could be harmful to the anti-gun cause, both sides admitted last week. New York's wealthy, influential, and legendarily anti-gun mayor could oppose an appeal out of fear that the conservative Supremes wouldn't preserve his own state's laws, which allow him to keep most concealed weapons off the street. Other states that allow limited concealed carry, such as Maryland and California, will also probably oppose an appeal for the same reason. They just don't trust the U.S. Supreme Court to uphold their restrictive laws.

This isn't to say that Madigan won't appeal. Her office has been publicly silent. In the wake of that school shooting, she may feel increasing pressure to file an appeal. Then again, she could just kick this to the General Assembly.

The National Rifle Association claims it has enough votes to block any attempt to enact a new concealed-carry law that is, in its opinion, too restrictive. Proposals to require million-dollar insurance policies or difficult training procedures or other significant restrictions are "off the table," declared Todd Vandermyde, the NRA's lobbyist.

There is no doubt that the pro-gun side has built clear majorities in both chambers in favor of concealed carry. A ruling from Speaker Michael Madigan, however, required the pro-gunners to find three-fifths majorities because the legislation would override local ordinances. The NRA is

just shy of that in the House, and barely at the threshold in the Senate.

But the NRA's majorities were built on promises to restrict the right to carry guns to specific places and to mandate strenuous training. Schools would be off-limits, for instance. Training would be required to obtain a permit. Those provisions were put into the last bill the NRA pushed in order to attract more votes.

The question now becomes whether the NRA can hold onto its majorities in the face of a strong and panicked push by the other side to pass a restrictive bill in line with last week's opinion, which specifically mentioned as reasonable keeping guns out of schools, government buildings, and businesses that don't want them, and further stated that "a person who carries a gun in public but is not well-trained in the use of firearms is a menace to himself and others."

But the NRA's lobbyist said that supporters came out of the woodwork after the appellate-court decision was handed down. For instance, Vandermyde claims, several African-American legislators had previously confided that they'd like to vote for concealed carry but couldn't. Now, Vandermyde says, many of those same lawmakers pledged to side with the NRA.

The NRA's coalition may be tough to hold together, however, if Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Governor Pat Quinn, House Speaker Madigan, and strongly anti-gun Senate President John Cullerton all team up to pass an alternative bill. Several members who might like to support concealed carry also happen to have jobs with the city and county, or have loved ones who do.

But Vandermyde doesn't actually have to pass a bill. He just has to make sure that the other side cannot do so. And anyone who has been around the legislative process for more than a minute knows that killing a bill is always a whole lot easier than passing one.

If the NRA successfully delays legislative action until the 180-day time limit has passed, then barring any further delays the state's carry restrictions would be declared unenforceable.

Despite last week's mass shooting, I wouldn't bet too much money against the gun guys at the moment.

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