



*A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right*

According to *Wikipedia*, “there are several versions of the text of the Second Amendment, each with slight capitalization and punctuation differences, found in the official documents surrounding the adoption of the Bill of Rights. One version was passed by the Congress, while another is found in the copies distributed to the States and then ratified by them.”

Below is the version ratified by the States and authenticated by Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State. Consider its grammatical structure. Does the structure suggest a particular understanding of the text?

A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

Here is the version passed by the Congress. How does the interesting, and archaic, rhetorical punctuation contribute to or detract from the meaning of the text?

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

At the top of the page is a reproduction of part of the original hand-written copy, approved by the House and Senate, prepared by scribe William Lambert; it can be found in the National Archives.