

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee,

Let me begin by thanking you all, and specifically the staff of Representative Ron Hood for being able to testify before you today.

My name is Corey LeRoux and I am 30 years old. I have been a resident of the great State of Ohio my entire life. I would like to start by giving you a brief history of myself and what brought me here today. In 2002 I enlisted in the United States Army Reserve to serve and defend this great country. In the wake of the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 it seemed to be the only way that I could outwardly express my love for this nation and to support it in a time when it needed me most. In the following eight years I deployed twice to Iraq in support of the Global War on Terror and spent a majority of that time embedded with and interacting with what was initially the “Iraqi National Guard” and later the Iraqi Army. In fact, during my second tour the Forward Operating Base that I was stationed on had been divided in half to accommodate a section of the Iraqi Army. It was during my time in the US military that I not only gained an understanding of how to properly and safely own and operate a firearm, but an appreciation of guns that I continue to have to this day. Much like a set of kitchen knives, an automobile, or a chainsaw, firearms are safe in the hands of those who respect them and understand the importance of such a powerful and dangerous tool.

I come to you today in support of House Bill 152. Not because I am a “gun nut”; not because I want every citizen armed to the teeth; and certainly not because I am in any way bound by an organization or group who would want this testimony on record. I come to you today as someone who understands that apart from the rhetoric and incessant banter the facts and numbers speak for themselves: In the wrong hands, guns are deadly and innocent people suffer because of them, but in the right hands, guns save lives.

Before I bore you with numbers and figures, let me first propose two truths that should remain unscathed throughout the remainder of my testimony if I am to be taken seriously. The first is this:

Guns, much like dozens of other everyday items, have the potential to take a human life. Also, much like dozens of their deadly counterparts, guns lack the ability to kill when unattended by a human operator with the intent to take another’s life.

The second truth is this:

Guns, much like dozens of other everyday items, can be possessed by both law abiding and law flouting citizens. However, unlike dozens of their deadly counterparts, cannot be obtained and utilized by those who wish to follow the law as easily as those who wish to disregard it.

For your consideration, I present the two most widely used weapons in homicides in the U.S. in 2011 (according to Supplemental Homicide Report, 2011 by the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/NACJD/series/57/studies/33527?q=supplementary+homicide+&archive=NACJD&sortBy=7&paging.rows=25&paging.startRow=1>). That is, knives and firearms.

To legally acquire a firearm in the State of Ohio, the following process is required:

- 1.) Visit a legally authorized dealer of firearms, that is, a holder of a federal firearms license
- 2.) Fill out federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Form 4473, which aims to confirm an individual's identity and behavior record via a background check.

To legally carry that firearm, a citizen must:

- 1.) Apply to their local sheriff's office through the Ohio Peace Officers Training Commission, which requires:

- A.) Prerequisite attendance & certification from an authorized training course, typically costing upwards of \$100

B.) The applicant must be at least 21 years old, be a resident of Ohio for 45 days, be a resident of the issuing county, and include a set of fingerprints. This is to undergo an additional background check to ensure the applicant is within the legal stipulations put in place for concealed carry weapons permit holders.

To legally acquire and carry a knife capable of taking a life in the state of Ohio, the following process is required:

1.) Visit any retail establishment that sells knives and pay retail price plus tax.

Some may argue that those who wish to legally carry firearms are the type of people who would ignore the law and subsequently use their firearms to cause harm to others. I encourage the committee to consider that those who would ignore the laws that forbid taking another's life without justification would very obviously ignore those laws which require two separate background checks to carry a concealed firearm. However, those who would follow such laws are statistically more likely to follow other laws, and are less likely to commit violent crime. According to data presented in a 2011 New York Times article based upon North Carolina violent crimes and concealed weapons permits, one would expect those with concealed carry permits (2% of the population) to be statistically responsible for 60 deaths over 5 years, in reality they are only responsible for 10. (See <http://www.thetruthaboutguns.com/2011/12/foghorn/ny-times-uses-deceptive-statistics-to-promote-anti-gun-agenda-again/>). It can therefore be assumed that those who legally carry firearms are not only law-abiding citizens, but are capable of understanding the gravity of owning and carrying such a dangerous tool. I have met several CCW permit holders in Ohio and elsewhere who share the same understanding of firearms that I do. It is a permit that we have applied for and obtained with the strong hope that we never, ever have to use it. Taking a human life is not something that the law-abiding populace takes lightly.

As you know, HB 152 does not change any of the laws surrounding obtaining a firearm through legal means. It simply allows those who wish to legally and safely carry a firearm to do so, without the need to complete an expensive course, and go through a duplicative process of background checks, the same as they underwent to obtain their firearm legally in the first place. Take for example my wife Sara. She is less than 60 days from giving birth to our first child. I have, on numerous occasions, gone to the firing range with her. I have covered firearms safety dozens of times, to the point where she now says "I know, I know... treat every weapon as if it's loaded.", when I begin to remind her of the basics. She is, for all intents and purposes, a safe and responsible gun owner. However, because she has not attended a state-approved course and paid a CCW license application fee, she is unable to carry what could be a lifesaving tool. This fact keeps me up at night. I consider the plight of Michelle Wilkins, a 26-year-old woman who was seven months' pregnant when she responded to a Craig's List ad in Longmont, Colorado. When she met with the woman who had claimed to be selling baby clothes, she was viciously attacked and her unborn child died from injuries sustained during the attack. The weapon was a three inch knife. Had Michelle Wilkins been carrying a firearm, she possibly could have saved the life of her child. Furthermore, assuming that she is a law abiding citizen, I would be extremely reluctant to believe that she would haphazardly use her firearm in a way that would harm another person without just cause.

One additional argument that may be waged against laws like HB 152 is that without requiring a permit, the likelihood of unintentional injuries would increase due to the untrained and irresponsible citizen who now carries a gun. Not only is there no evidence to support the idea that removing the requirement to have a CCW permit will increase the number of untrained persons carrying firearms, I urge you to consider this: In my time deployed to Iraq with the U.S. Army I was constantly surrounded by men & women with guns. Some were well trained, & some were not (as mentioned earlier, I spent a large majority of my time in close quarters with the Iraqi Army). Even so, accidental discharges were extremely rare & I never experienced, nor even heard of a time when someone on base was shot by their own or another's firearm. Guns are not designed to "go off" for no reason. Even an untrained person must have malicious intent when yielding a firearm in order to cause harm to another. Much like a chainsaw cannot cut down a tree without an operator; a gun cannot kill without a killer.

In summary, I want to revisit the truths stated earlier. That is, guns have the potential to take a human life, but lack the ability to kill when unattended. And, guns are possessed by those who follow the law, and those who disregard it. These things will not change, nor will the simple fact that those who disregard the law will always exist. Do you want to leave those who follow the law unable to defend themselves? You have an opportunity to protect the innocent by giving them the same ability to carry a gun as those who already break the law. Does a killer stop to apply for a license? Does a rapist fill out an ATF Form 4473? Absolutely not. I ask you to please vote in support of HB 152 to give people like Michelle Wilkins, and yourselves and families, the ability to legally practice self defense and prevent more unnecessary innocent deaths while you have the opportunity.

In closing, I want to leave you with the understanding that my sentiments are not novel. I close with a quote that Thomas Jefferson preserved in his personal compilation of great quotations. It is a quote from the eighteenth-century criminologist Cesare Beccaria:

“False is the idea of utility that sacrifices a thousand real advantages for one imaginary or trifling inconvenience; that would take fire from men because it burns, and water because one may drown in it; that has no remedy for evils, except destruction. The laws that forbid the carrying of arms are laws of such a nature. They disarm those only who are neither inclined nor determined to commit crimes. Can it be supposed that those who have the courage to violate the most sacred laws of humanity, the most important of the code, will respect the less important and arbitrary ones, which can be violated with ease and impunity, and which, if strictly obeyed, would put an end to personal liberty—so dear to men, so dear to the enlightened legislator—and subject innocent persons to all the vexations that the guilty alone ought to suffer? Such laws make things worse for the assaulted and better for the assailants; they serve rather to encourage than to prevent homicides, for an unarmed man may be attacked with greater confidence than an armed man. They ought to be designated as laws not preventive but fearful of crimes, produced by the tumultuous impression of a few isolated facts, and not by thoughtful consideration of the inconveniences and advantages of a universal decree.”

Thank you.