

Testimony on House Bill 178
Senate Government Oversight Committee
Rep. John Becker, Chair
Rep. Reggie Stoltzfus, Vice Chair
Rep. Adam C. Miller, Ranking Member

Submitted by:

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Thank you, Chair Becker, Vice Chair Stoltzfus, Ranking Member Miller, and committee members, for allowing me to submit this testimony on House Bill 178.

I am a private citizen who is concerned about House Bill 178, which I believe would unnecessarily increase gun violence risks for me, my family, and for my fellow Ohioans.

Government exists primarily to serve and protect its citizens. When, in 2015, Ohio legislators reduced initial concealed handgun license training from 12 to 8 hours, allowed online training, eliminated the 45-day Ohio residency requirement, and allowed a person to carry a concealed and loaded handgun into a bar, I was shocked. Those 2015 changes to the law were clearly not designed to help ensure the safety of Ohio citizens.

More recently, Ohio legislators attempted to pass a Stand Your Ground bill (HB 228), despite clear evidence that removing the “duty to retreat” makes us less safe. That bill also included language that would have effectively eliminated the penalty for concealed carry without a permit. I was thankful that the legislature listened to citizens’ and law enforcements’ concerns and removed both of those measures from the bill in the last legislative session.

If House Bill 178 succeeds, allowing people to carry concealed guns in public without a permit and without safety training would make citizens even more vulnerable.

Who will protect us, our children, and our grandchildren from those who choose to carry deadly weapons? Do the rights of gun owners supersede the rights of those who choose not to own guns? There is ample evidence that gun regulation decreases homicides (see this overview of 130 studies across 10 countries: <https://www.sciencealert.com/scientific-evidence-that-stricter-gun-control-works-saves-lives>). Results from one study (see article cited above) shows that Missouri’s homicide rate increased by 25 percent after that state eliminated laws requiring a permit to buy a firearm. According to that study, no other legislative changes seemed to explain this significant increase. Despite this sort of evidence, lawmakers continue to work toward decreasing regulations surrounding gun access and use.

Police officers are charged with helping to preserve the peace and keep citizens safe. They oppose House Bill 178, and it’s easy to understand why. If House Bill 178 is passed, how will a police officer know if a person stopped for a traffic violation has the right to own and carry a gun?

I have heard the argument that a “bad guy with a gun” can be best stopped by a “good guy

with a gun,” and that the “bad guys” will get guns anyway, so the “good guys” must be armed. However, as we learned from the Parkland shooting, one “good guy with a gun” is not sufficient. As a former teacher, I know how chaotic a classroom can be in the best of circumstances, and am horrified to think that a proposed solution to school shootings is to arm teachers. I believe most teachers would agree that such a solution would make students and teachers even less safe. How, for example, would an armed teacher be able to properly differentiate a shooter from another student? Teachers are not trained, as police officers are, to handle such situations, and should not be expected to take on that sort of responsibility for the lives of their students. Even in the hands of a “good guy,” a gun can, through carelessness or by accident, harm innocent people.

I’ve also heard the argument that guns don’t kill people – people do. So, is a toddler who shoots and kills someone guilty of murder, and the gun irrelevant?

When I was a child, I understood that police officers carried guns, but I assumed they were highly trained and would only use their weapons when absolutely necessary. Even so, seeing an officer with a gun scared me. I never imagined that now, as a senior citizen, the ordinary person next to me in a public building or other public space might be lawfully concealing a weapon. If House Bill 178 passes, I will also have to worry that the person standing next to me might not only be carrying a concealed weapon, but may be doing so without a permit, safety training, or any education at all about how, where, and when the weapon can be used. How can I expect a reasonable level of safety as I go about my day? More importantly, how can I protect my grandchildren? Surely everyone in this room shares such safety concerns, whether or not they own firearms.

Of course we can never completely eliminate risk while we are alive, but other countries have greatly reduced homicide rates by tackling regulations surrounding firearms. I have heard the claim that, because of the Second Amendment, comparisons cannot be properly made regarding firearm regulations in the United States and any other country. However, even without taking into account the well-regulated militia clause, the Second Amendment does not and must not supersede the Constitutionally granted right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Just as my rights end where another person’s nose begins, Second Amendment rights should end where the general public’s right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness begins. Furthermore, Justice Scalia’s decision in *Heller* made clear that the right to bear arms has limits and is “not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose.” (See <https://www.newsweek.com/antonin-scalia-ronald-reagan-supreme-court-orlando-shooting-newtown-sandy-hook-472460>.)

House Bill 178 would further threaten my safety and the safety of my children and grandchildren. It would also further threaten the safety of everyone in this room—including those who choose to conceal carry and do so safely and responsibly—and all of those we love. How can we, in good conscience, justify our failure to do what we can to keep our children and grandchildren safe?