



A Multi-Faith Coalition

to Reduce Gun Violence

Rep. John Becker, Chair  
Federalism Committee  
The Ohio House of Representatives

May 20, 2019

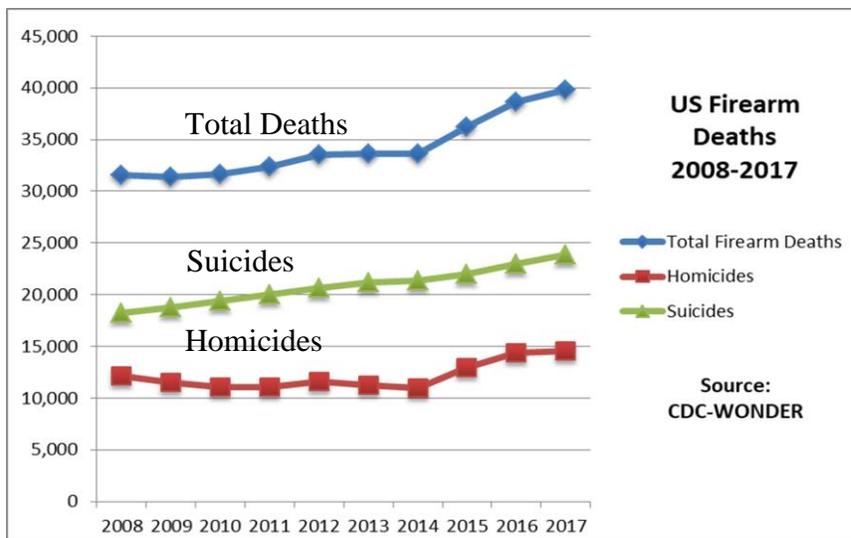
Dear Chairman Becker, Ranking Member Miller, and Committee Members,

**God Before Guns offers the following written testimony in consideration of House Bill 178:**

God Before Guns is a multi-faith coalition based in Ohio and working to reduce gun violence in our communities. Our Board of Directors strongly urges your opposition to HB 178.

In recent years the Ohio Legislature has passed a number of bills that make it easier to buy firearms in our state, easier to carry hidden firearms, and easier to carry firearms into more public locations. We have also seen reductions in penalties for violating the regulations that remain. This bill would continue that trend and leads us to ask the question, how is Ohio being served by such legislation?

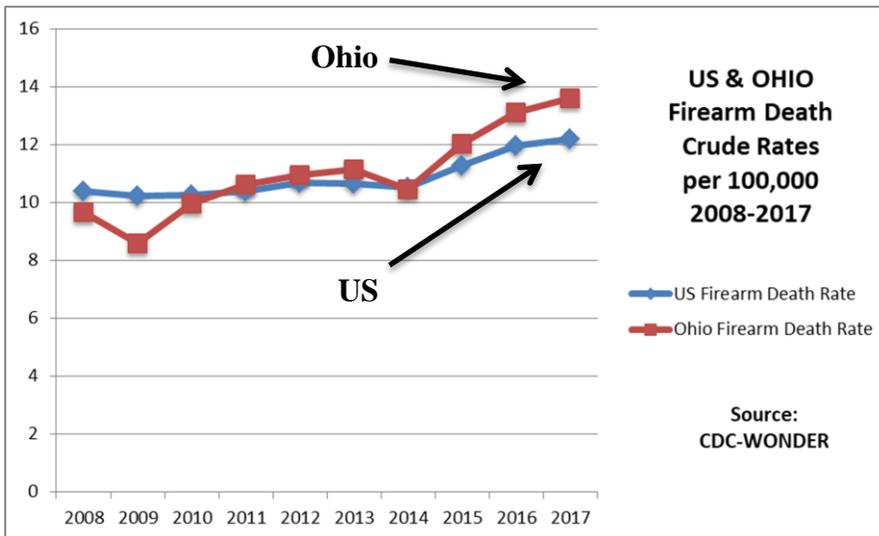
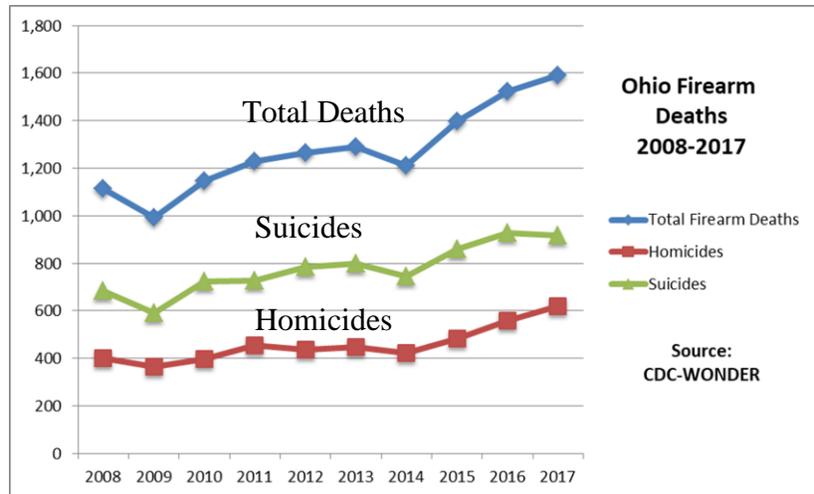
To answer that question we consulted data provided by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Below you can see a graphic of gun-related deaths in recent years for the US. All data below is posted by the CDC at <https://wonder.cdc.gov/mcd-icd10.html> and represents their most recent records (data released Dec. 2018).



As the graph shows, over a 10 year period, gun deaths in the US are on the increase, especially since 2014.

**From 2014 to 2017 gun deaths increased approx. 18%, and both suicides and homicides are on the rise.**

As this graph shows, like the US generally, Ohio has also experienced an increase in gun deaths over a 10 year period, especially since 2014. Fortunately suicides showed some indication of levelling off in 2016 but homicides continue to climb significantly. **Ohio's total gun deaths increased approx. 31% from 2014 to 2017.**



By looking at firearm death rates we can compare Ohio with the US. Both the US rate and the Ohio rate have increased since 2014 but Ohio's increase is more dramatic. From 2008 to 2014 Ohio's rate was below or roughly equal to the overall US rate. But beginning in 2015 Ohio's gun death rate began to increase at a faster rate than the overall US rate. **Ohio's gun death rate as reported by the CDC is now more than 11% above the US rate and increasing faster than the US rate.**

The facts are clear; more guns in more hands in more places are not making Ohio safer. In fact the latest figures show that nearly 1600 Ohioans died from gun shots in 2017. Our Legislature should be addressing ways to reduce gun-related homicides and gun-related suicides. Our Legislature should not be adopting extreme measures like HB 178 that would invite untrained persons without background checks to carry hidden weapons. Our Legislature should not be eliminating the permit system that prohibits persons charged with or even convicted of various felonies and misdemeanors from carrying hidden weapons. And our Legislature should not pass a bill that absolves gun carrying persons from the responsibility to disclose that they are armed when law enforcement personnel pull them over in a traffic stop.

A more exhaustive analysis could examine a comparison between gun-related deaths in Ohio and other states. We do not attempt that analysis here, but there is convincing additional evidence showing that states that have taken reasonable actions to regulate firearms (e.g. through more comprehensive background checks, permit systems, red flag laws, and other measures) are predominant among the states with significantly lower rates of gun violence.

The data above clearly show that Ohio has a public safety problem related to the proliferation of firearms in the wrong hands. We hear from HB 178 proponents that their right to “constitutional carry” is protected by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment, and that no other right in our Bill of Rights requires a permit for its exercise. That claim is patently false. Every right in the Bill of Rights is limited, and public safety is a primary justification for reasonable limits. Freedoms of speech, press, and religion are clearly limited where threats to public safety are concerned. And as God Before Guns can attest from numerous experiences, every time we seek to hold a rally or march under our 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment freedom of assembly we are required to obtain a permit, a requirement that we accept as our responsibility to public safety.

No, the real difference between the right to bear arms and the other freedoms conferred by the Bill of Rights is that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment addresses a right related to ownership and use of an instrument that is designed to kill. Unlike the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment freedoms, the ownership and use of a firearm is inherently dangerous and requires not only a high degree of responsibility but rigorous regulation to protect public safety. As US Supreme Court Justice Scalia noted in *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008),

“Like most rights, the right secured by the Second Amendment is not unlimited. From Blackstone through the 19th-century cases, commentators and courts routinely explained that the right was not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose.”

HB 178 would legalize and invite the carrying of hidden guns by persons who are untrained, un-checked by the NICS system, and in some cases already charged or convicted of offenses that were previously considered disqualifying to carry a hidden firearm. God Before Guns urges the members of this committee to vote in opposition to this extreme bill and to work to reduce gun violence in Ohio by defeating HB 178.

Testimony submitted by  
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