

May 22, 2019

Re: Opposition to HB 178, the "Permitless Carry" bill

Dear Representative Becker and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lara Kowalczyk. I am a student at Grandview Heights High School. Currently, I am the co-President of the Students Demand Action Chapter at Grandview Heights High School. Thank you for giving me the time to hear my testimony. I am here today to share with you why, as an Ohioan and student, I am opposed to HB 178.

As a student, I have grown up in an environment where I am continually worried about becoming a victim of gun violence. HB 178 does nothing to protect the next generation of doctors, teachers, lawyers, and politicians. We know this by looking at what happened in Alaska. Alaska was the first to pass a law of this kind. Between 2003 and 2017, the rate of aggravated assaults committed with a firearm in the state increased 82%. That means that the threat of a mass shooting is even greater in a society that already faces the substantial threat of gun violence.

The threat of a school shooting has been a prominent thought throughout my childhood. In first grade, I remember the first lockdown drill I experienced and the fear that overcame me when an administrator knocked on my classrooms door. It was only a drill, yet, I was terrified that it was real. Growing up, I've listened to the news about Sandy Hook, Saunders Elementary, Parkland and Highlands Ranch. The Sandy Hook gunman was 20 years old. The Saunders Elementary school gunman was 17 years old. The Parkland gunman was 19 years old. The Highlands Ranch gunmen were 16 and 18 years old. With a permitless carry law enacted, teenagers, like those who carry out these horrendous mass shootings, will be able to access a weapon with no required training or safety practice. In Ohio, under current law, one must be 21 years of age to get a conceal carry permit. With the passage of a permitless concealed carry, those under the age of 21 will be able to access and walk on our streets with a loaded firearm without notifying anyone. This is terrifying because we know that the majority of those that carry out mass shootings in schools are under the age of 21. This law will loosen our current laws and give troubled teenagers the opportunity to hurt themselves and/or kill their peers.

This doesn't just affect the educational environment. With the Las Vegas shooting, constituents started to realize that the problem of gun violence doesn't just affect students or downtrodden communities. This epidemic affects all of us. In 2017, I realized that I cannot walk into a concert

venue or movie theatre without having a sense of fear that I could walk out as a victim of gun violence. 90% of Ohio voters support requiring a permit to carry a concealed handgun in public. The Ohio General Assembly should listen and realize that this concern will only rise in our communities if we pass this dangerous legislation.

As a young adult in today's America, I have been a part of different political movements. The majority of movements have been driven by the young people. The teenagers in Parkland organized March for Our Lives in less than a month. With over 200,000 Americans taking the streets in Washington D.C., elected officials can no longer underestimate the power of the young people. In 2020, I will be of voting age and I will vote. I will ensure that my peers vote. If elected officials continue to pass irresponsible legislation like this, the consequences will be seen at the ballot box.

It is the government's duty to have a role in the health and safety of our communities. The government has done so with topics of food safety and healthcare; however, there has been little to no regulation on firearms that will benefit our community. We are here to ensure that proper measures are taken to reduce gun violence in our country. If HB 178 is passed, all it will do is increase personal feelings of insecurity in our communities and decrease a young person's likelihood of safely coming home to dinner. This is a step back. If we want the gun violence in our country to come to an end, we need to take measures to ensure that we are protecting our constituents and future generations.

I am asking that Ohio lawmakers vote no on HB 178. I hope I can count on you to do that.

Lara Kowalczyk

Columbus, Ohio

