

June 5, 2019

Representative Becker
Chairperson, House Federalism Committee
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

Re: Opposition to HB 178

Dear Chairman Becker and Members of the Committee,

My name is Matthew Youkilis. I recently graduated from Walnut Hills High School in Cincinnati, and I will be attending Yale University this fall. Thank you for listening to my testimony and for your open-mindedness on this issue.

Today, I am here testifying as a representative of Lobbying for A Safer Tomorrow (or LAST), a group that organized over 200 students from across Ohio to meet with our legislators, including many of you, on March 14th of last year, about potential gun safety legislation in Ohio. We had hope that we, a younger generation of Americans who have felt the ferocity of the gun violence epidemic, would show you the importance of passing laws that will make this state safer for all Ohioans.

Unfortunately, I find myself here today testifying not in favor of legislation that will make us safer, but against legislation that will make us less safe. Why are we choosing to regress? If we make this decision, young people like me will not want to live in this state in the future. Why are you, individuals with more power on this issue than anyone else in Ohio—yes, even gun rights interest groups—considering a bill that will undoubtedly increase gun violence in this state (as it has in other states like Alaska, Arizona, and Missouri) and is not even democratically supported? I can tell you, the students of LAST and the students of Ohio do not support such senseless negative action. And I don't need any college Political Science class to tell me that, when 88 percent of people believe you should have to get a permit before being able to carry a concealed handgun in public, there is clear democratic opposition to this bill.

And I am here as more than just a representative of LAST. I am here because this bill that you are debating has a real impact. Gun violence, much to the chagrin of all of us I hope—is an unfortunate unifying factor among Americans and Ohioans. It touches every community, black or white, rural or urban, rich or poor. And it touched my family on February 14th of last year when a gunman killed 17 individuals at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. When tragedies happen, you always hear the story about the victim who was “the kindest person in the world.” Well I'm going to repeat that story, because my forever 14 year old cousin Jaime, who should be getting her driver's license next month when she would be turning 16, had the brightest smile and always looked out for the underdog. When you vote on this bill, think of how your vote could be saving or could be ending the life of another one of those people who was “the kindest person in the world.”

We all will suffer if House Bill 178 becomes law. That is why everyone from victims to victims' families to public citizens to law enforcement has spoken in opposition to this bill. It increases paranoia, as it should, because it will create a state

where seemingly anyone can carry a weapon, even violent criminals. I can understand how the language of this bill can seem like an enhancement of our freedoms—not having to notify law enforcement, making it easier to carry certain firearms—but the reality of this bill is that it endangers our most basic God-given freedoms and natural rights, and it endangers everyone in our communities, from those who serve as police officers to our families to gun owners themselves. To be “pro-life” is to not support this bill.

I appreciate that you have taken time to listen to my story, and I hope that you will truly consider my perspective on this issue. I am asking you, members of the Ohio House of Representatives Federalism Committee, to vote no on House Bill 178, and I hope that you can represent the students of Ohio and your constituents and do so.