

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

Submitted by:
The Rev. Canon Dr. Lee Anne Reat
Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio

Chairman Becker, Vice Chair Stoltzfus, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the committee, I come before you today to testify in opposition to House Bill 178. I speak on behalf of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio and as a concerned citizen of Ohio. The Episcopal Church advocates for reasonable gun laws that serve to protect citizens and curb gun violence. In 2015 the General Convention of the Episcopal Church USA passed a resolution calling for a requirement for permits to carry concealed weapons and the prohibition of persons from purchasing guns without evidence of gun safety training.

The extent of gun violence in America is a grave concern for all of us. Some of us are so gripped by fear that we think carrying a weapon will keep us safe. The validity of this belief can and has been argued before the committee and I will not address it today. What I do want to address is a theological argument that is often used in the debate over gun safety and regulation. I have heard time and time again that it is a “God given right” to carry weapons and use them to defend ourselves and our families. The assumption that any of our laws are God given seems to be based on the words of the Declaration of Independence that all men are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

When God created humanity, God gave us the gift of perfect freedom, free will. But we very quickly demonstrated our need for guidance, for standards for our behavior. So God created those boundaries, those standards, through the giving of the Law. God’s laws are summarized by Jesus in Matthew’s gospel – love God, love your neighbor, love yourself. Our civil laws also provide us with necessary guidance, with standards and expectations for behaviors. The framers of our Declaration of Independence and Constitution may have looked to God for inspiration, but they did not, could not, dictate the mind of God when they wrote those civil and political documents.

Our national, state and local governments exist to set reasonable standards of behavior based on our founding documents and the will of the people. We have laws, good and just laws, requiring education and training for a myriad number of things – education for our children, training and licensing for lawyers, teachers, doctors, even hair stylists. Why? Because our collective wisdom tells us that education and training make for a better and safer world.

HB 178 would rid our state of the requirement for training for people who wish to carry concealed firearms. Putting the use of deadly weapons in the hands of untrained individuals is dangerous and irresponsible.

I have heard proponents of this bill argue that those in possession of illegal weapons will carry them without training regardless of the law. That is true, but the vast majority of citizens respect and adhere to the law. Laws requiring training are in place to help guide our behaviors, to ensure the safety of our communities, and to maintain order in our society. To suggest training to gun owners is not a strong enough incentive for training, any more than suggesting a license to operate a motor vehicle or to practice law. We are human and humans do not always make the best choices for themselves or others. Doing away with the mandate to have training before carrying concealed weapons will not make our communities safer. Fewer people are likely to seek out training if the law does not require it.

I urge the committee to vote against HB 178. The bill may create the illusion of safety for some. It may create the illusion of maintaining the rights of some people. It does neither. This bill puts law abiding citizens in danger of injury or death at the hands of untrained gun carriers.