

Chairman Becker and the Federalism Committee:

First and foremost, I had already written my remarks and was just about to hit send when the tragedy at Virginia Beach occurred. This morning, I still have an ache in my heart and a very bad taste in my mouth over that, and I can only say that the way-too-often occurrence of these mass shootings is one of the main reasons I am here today. This recent tragedy just adds to the growing body of evidence that we as a society are facing an epidemic of gun violence, and I'm here seeking your help to put an end this horrible time in our nation's history.

My name is Richele O'Connor and I am a retired professor from the College of Education and Human Services at Wright State University; it is safe to say I have spent my whole adult life caring about the educational needs and the safety of children. These concerns extend to adults, even to those of you in this room with whom I seem to disagree! Yet my religion and our constitution are such a part of me that I truly want life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for us all.

I want to make it clear how much I value our Constitution and how this appreciation extends to the Second Amendment. You must understand that I grew up in a household where there was always a gun, I knew where it was stored, and because my dad was a policeman who had access to a weapon, I enjoyed a sense of security. So I sort of understand the position of those of you who hold such affection and adoration for your Glocks and 357 Magnums and other weapons of choice. You feel safe when you are carrying, and because you have legally obtained your license and completed the training, I harbor no objection.

So instead of copying and pasting statistics from various researchers as part of my testimony today, I'm going to take a different tack. Like the gentleman who used his coat as a visual aid, I'm going to use this children's toy. Have you ever seen a child do this? (Turning a Lego into a gun) Whether it be Legos or sticks, this is something kids will do. I'm not trying to suggest anything here other than the fact that guns are a part of our culture and always will be, and I'm not advocating that we take guns away from citizens who are law abiding and who are not deemed as a danger to themselves and others. However, I wish to emphasize that with this right to own a gun comes a responsibility. We don't give kids real guns, do we? No, because we ALL want those with guns to use them responsibly, safely and sensibly. Thus, we would never put them in the hands of a child now, would we?

I said I wasn't going to quote a bunch of studies, you've heard them all before, the studies from the likes of Stanford and Johns Hopkins, but can we really deny the statistics that indicate that we are becoming more unsafe as a nation? Isn't that why we're here, because none of us feel as safe as we did, say, six years ago? Can we deny the increase in school shootings? (Everytown researchers estimates that 3 million

children are exposed to shootings per year; they've been tracking the data since 2013). Can we deny the increase in hate crimes and vitriolic behaviors, and I could digress but won't into the impact of social media, violent video games, the preponderance of violence in movies and other shows, and the increase in diagnoses of mental illness. Sadly, this perfect storm for accelerated gun violence in which we live includes many variables.

To me the looming question is this: What's it going to take for us to realize we are all on the same side, sharing many of the same concerns? When I listen to stories of survivors, when I listen to a thirteen year old boy say that he doesn't want to lose any more of his loved ones, my heart just breaks. Can't we please figure this out together? Training and background checks: they just make sense. Working with law enforcement instead of against them, it just makes sense.

Government can and should make laws that keep its people safe. I have heard proponent testimony where the individual believes training is important for gun owners, yet the government shouldn't regulate it. This anti-government sentiment and logic escapes me. When I was a professor, I didn't particularly enjoy writing reports to conform with government regulations, yet I understood the need for checks and balances that ensured the future teachers were properly trained and that we weren't admitting pedophiles into our programs. To me permitless carry with a weapon, whether it's open carry or not, is tantamount to saying anyone can teach, no training required. Some of you have children. Do you want a teacher with no preparation instructing your child? Maybe you don't like my analogy, but I've heard far crazier ones during these last several weeks of testimony.

In closing, I do believe we all want the same outcome, a safer society. I know this to be true from listening to you all during these hearings and from your commitment to public service. You want your sons and daughters and loved ones to be safe from harm, and you serve because you have a vision for a better world. But HB 178 is a step in the wrong direction. Let's do something bold, something unusual, something we can't even imagine sitting here today. Let's work together, because we all want the same goal, and let's figure out a way for Ohio to show the rest of the country how much we care, how much we know, and how to do the right thing . . . together.