

PAT KRUMMRICH, Opposition Testimony for HB 178, 6/19/19

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I am Pat Krummrich, from Canton, Ohio and I oppose HB 178. I appreciate the chance to speak today. I'd like to share with you my personal experience of how gun violence affects Ohio's children and their families and how this relates to HB178.

I recently retired from Akron Children's Hospital where I was a Medical Speech Pathologist, specializing in pediatric feeding and swallowing. Among my case load, I treated infants, children and teens who had been shot, intentionally or unintentionally. My job was to assess whether these children were still able to eat by mouth and to provide feeding and swallowing therapy. Many of them could not eat orally because the structures of the head, neck or chest were so badly damaged. In many cases, the nerves in the brain that control swallowing were damaged and they could no longer swallow safely. Gun injuries cause a massive amount of tissue damage, especially to the bones and soft tissue of the face and mouth. They require 10 times more blood units and are 14 times more likely to result in death than other types of serious injuries.⁽¹⁾ It's pretty tough to walk into the hospital room of a 2 year old and see them laying there, IV lines and tubes everywhere, often a feeding tube coming out of their nose or abdomen, many times a respirator beeping. Some children would recover the ability to eat but some would have to be fed through a tube for the rest of their lives. After assessing each child, I helped explain the feeding decision to the already devastated family. And I would ask myself, who was looking out for the rights of this child or this family?

We treated a lot of teenagers who had been shot. Lots of suicide attempts, occasional drive by shootings, sometimes just random accidental shootings. Even if these children survive and improve with time and treatment, when the brain has been traumatized, they're never really the same. Sometimes they lose years of development and mental functioning or their personality changes. I remember one really big tall high schooler who already had an athletic scholarship offer for college. And then he was shot in a random drive by shooting and he had to relearn everything; how to walk, how to talk, how to feed himself. I don't think he ever made it to college. He was a gentle giant and we all loved him. I remember another young lady who was reportedly a normal kid until she was shot and then she became really aggressive. We worked on her speech and memory for almost a year but her behavior was really hard to handle. I'm not sure that she was ever able to live at home again because of her aggression. And then there are the families. Once they have gotten through the horror of the initial hospitalization, they may have to care for an impaired child for the rest of their lives. They worry about who will care for their child when they die.

Gun injuries are the 2nd leading cause of death among children and teens in America and the first leading cause of death in black children and teens.⁽²⁾ More than cancer, more than birth defects, more than infectious disease.

Annually, 18,000 to 20,000 children and teens are shot nationwide and about 3,000 of those die.⁽³⁾ That's an average of about 51 young people shot every day.⁽⁴⁾ Compared to other high-income countries, America's children are at least 21 times more likely to be killed with guns.⁽⁵⁾ I don't know why we can't take care of our children as well as other countries. I believe we can do better.

Why are these children being shot? Nationwide, 58% are homicides; including intentional shootings, children shot during the commission of a crime and children shot during a domestic dispute.⁽⁶⁾ Thirty-six percent are suicides, typically using a gun found in the home, belonging to a parent or relative.⁽⁶⁾ Access to a firearm increases the risk of death by suicide by 3 times.⁽⁷⁾ Another 4% are unintentional.⁽⁸⁾

So how does this relate to HB 178? If you pass this bill, you will be taking away some of the most valuable tools that we have to reduce the kinds of tragedies I've just described. We can't stop them all, but we can reduce them and that means saving children's lives. We need to keep these tools:

Requirement for training: I personally do not want my child sitting in a restaurant next to some guy who has never live fired the loaded gun in his pocket. I suppose that some gun advocates will say, "Responsible gun owners will get training on their own". I'm sure many of them will. But even the best intentioned of us sometimes let important things slip by if it's not legally required of us. Or some people may think they don't need the training. Having a modest 8 hours of training required to get a CCW permit for a handgun makes training enforceable and builds a culture of compliance.

Permits: 90% of the voters in Ohio support permits and background checks.⁽⁹⁾ I heard the sponsors of HB 178 argue that no other constitutional right requires you to get a permit to exercise that right. But I can think of many instances where you must follow certain laws, sometimes including getting a permit, to exercise a right. For instance, If you gather with a group to peaceably protest, the government may limit your speech by "time, place and manner", most commonly by requiring a permit. When I speak in this chamber there are rules that I must follow to be sure that I don't infringe on someone else's right to speak. If I want to exercise my right to due process of law, there are all kinds of laws about how I can do that. No other right poses more risk to the safety and rights of others than the right to bear arms. I respect the 2nd amendment but it is reasonable to have

laws that allow people to carry hand guns and yet protects the rights (and lives) of every citizen.

Background checks: When Connecticut implemented permits which required background checks for all handgun buyers, gun homicides in the state fell 40 percent⁽¹⁰⁾ and gun suicides fell 15%.⁽¹¹⁾ When Missouri repealed a similar law, gun homicides in that state rose up to 27%⁽¹²⁾ and gun suicides rose 16%.⁽¹¹⁾ Recently gun advocates have been citing a study by the University of Pittsburgh that found that legal gun owners in Pittsburgh are far less likely to commit gun crimes than those who are in illegal possession of a gun owned by someone else⁽¹³⁾. Yes! Something we agree on! But we see this as proof that background checks successfully identify and disqualify individuals who are the most likely to commit gun violence. I don't think that most legal gun owners see background checks as an unfair burden. On the contrary, a large majority of gun owners support background checks.⁽¹⁴⁾ Like other common sense gun safety laws, they allow legal gun owners, non-gun owners and law enforcement to be in partnership together to reduce the number of guns in the hands of criminals.

We do have a major “diversion” problem in Ohio. Our Background checks could work a lot better if they were required for all handgun sales and transfers, like Connecticut's. As you know, only federally licensed dealers (“those who are “engaged in the business of selling guns for the principal purpose of livelihood and profit”) are required to run background checks in Ohio. Prohibited buyers can easily “divert” their purchase to an unlicensed dealer or private seller who they may find on-line, on the street, or sometimes at a gun show^(15,16). Unlicensed sellers are not required to complete background checks, keep records of transfers or sales or even check an ID. According to the ATF, the definition of “engaged in the business of” often frustrates the prosecution of “unlicensed dealers masquerading as collectors or hobbyists but who are really trafficking firearms to felons or other prohibited persons”⁽¹⁷⁾

A lot guns used in crimes are stolen and many are then trafficked to a prohibited person. The University of Pittsburgh study cited above found that in 44% of the cases where the perpetrator was not the owner of the firearm, the police could not get in contact with the original owner. When they did find the original owner, more than 30 % said the gun was stolen yet 42% of those “thefts” had never been reported prior to recovery by police. According to the ATF, “Owners who have illegally transferred their firearm, perhaps as a straw purchase, may be more likely to resist attempts by police to contact them or claim the firearm was

stolen after police contact them,”⁽¹⁶⁾ But we could make it tougher for traffickers by requiring that owners report all stolen guns immediately to the police. After all, responsible gun owners should be able to keep track of their guns,

One of the best meta-reviews of gun research that I have found is “Effects of Policies Designed to Keep Firearms from High-Risk Individuals” in the Annual Review of Public Health, March 2015. It’s 16 pages long and after looking at all the available evidence, the authors concluded that there is “Mounting evidence that ...rigorous Permit to Purchase handgun laws, comprehensive background checks, strong regulation and oversight of gun dealers, and laws requiring gun owners to promptly report lost or stolen firearms are effective in curtailing the diversion of guns to criminals” and that “rigorous PTP handgun laws are protective against homicides and suicides.”⁽¹⁸⁾ You can view this study at <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031914-122516>.

Gun violence is a complicated problem in America. These tools can’t fix it all. We also need to improve mental health services and promote safe storage but passing HB178 would take us back to square one. We need to keep our current permit, training and background laws. Gentlemen and gentlewomen, you have the power to save lives in Ohio with your decision about this bill. Please respect the voices of the 90% of Ohio voters and vote NO on HB 178.

Thank you.

Pat Krummrich

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