



Representative Thomas West
49th House District

Sponsor Testimony: House Bill 319

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the House State & Local Government Committee – thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 319. The intent of this bill is very simple: to restore local authority to regulate the ownership, possession, purchase, sale, transfer, transportation, storage, and keeping of firearms. In other words, we seek to allow local communities to do what is best for their unique needs.

HB 319 restores local authority by repealing HB 347, which the legislature passed in 2006 by overriding then-Governor Bob Taft’s veto. HB 347 prohibited local governments from passing any regulations more restrictive than those passed by the General Assembly.

The bill nullified ordinances already in effect in cities such as Cleveland, which had enacted a ban on assault weapons (which in its definition included a semiautomatic weapon rifle that takes a magazine of at least 20 rounds, like [the weapon used in the Dayton shooting](#)). Since then, courts have struck down other bills passed by municipalities because of HB 347.

According to the Cleveland [Plain Dealer](#), gun-related deaths in Ohio have increased nearly every year since HB 347 went into effect in 2007. Gun-related deaths have also increased sharply in Cleveland during the same time period.

In my mind, this should not be divisive or controversial. What right do we legislators have to say that we know better than elected officials at the local level? Why should Columbus tell Massillon, Wooster, Cincinnati or any other municipality how best to keep their residents safe? We cannot treat the principles

of local authority and home rule as optional and to be followed only when it is convenient for the legislature.

We have seen more senseless death from gun violence since the tragedy in Dayton more than a year ago now, and yet the legislature has not once taken action to make Ohioans safer. In July, a one-year-old child from Canton, Ace Lucas, was killed by gun violence while he was sleeping, and his twin brother was injured.

We have heard the phrase “do something” countless times by now, and yet the message has still fallen on deaf ears. Kids like Ace and families like his deserve to feel safe and secure no matter where they are, but especially at home.

Thank you again for this opportunity, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.