

Testimony on House Bill 178
Government Oversight Committee
Rep. Shane Wilkin, Chair
Rep. Andrea White, Vice Chair
Rep. Bride Rose Sweeney, Ranking Member

Submitted by:

Deborah Cooper

Thank you, Chair Wilkin, and committee members, for considering this testimony on the “permitless carry” bill.

As a private citizen, I believe this bill would not only increase gun violence risks for me, my family, and my neighbors, but would also infringe the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that underlies our Constitution and its amendments.

A couple of years ago, I attended opponent testimony hearings and heard statements from those familiar with firearms who understand the likely consequences of passing a permitless carry bill. We that, when the Missouri legislature eliminated laws requiring a permit to buy a firearm, the state saw a 25 percent increase in its homicide rate (see <https://www.sciencealert.com/scientific-evidence-that-stricter-gun-control-works-saves-lives>). Does our legislature REALLY want to endanger more Ohioans just so a few people don’t have to exercise their right to be arms responsibly?

Several times during the 2019 permitless carry hearings, a committee member stressed the importance of personal responsibility. I couldn’t agree more that acceptance of personal responsibility is essential to a functioning society. However, even if most gun owners fully understand their obligation to get adequate training, to properly secure their weapons, and to use them only when absolutely necessary and without harming any innocent lives, can we trust that all of them will follow gun safety rules if there is no requirement to do so? We have seen, during this pandemic, that armed protesters attempted to pry open the windows of our Statehouse because they didn’t appreciate the restrictions our governor had placed on them for their own safety. Did they have the right to protest? Absolutely. Did they have the right to bring guns to our Statehouse and behave in threatening ways toward journalists and bystanders? That’s a lot less clear. Perhaps most gun owners are responsible and would not use their guns to threaten or intimidate, but as we have seen, some gun owners abuse their rights. I know that fear or anxiety sometimes inspire less-than-perfect responses in dangerous situations. I also know that my own good intentions don’t always translate into positive action. Not one of us is perfect, and while we might wish to live with fewer restrictions, we clearly need those restrictions to ensure that the rights of ALL are properly respected.

An argument I’ve heard from those who would like to relax restrictions on guns owners maintain that a person with evil intent will find a way to get a gun a whether or not it is legal to do so. This is certainly true. We have speed limits, but even those who consider themselves upstanding citizens frequently disregard those limits. Does this mean we should have no speed limits, and no consequences for ignoring them? In fact, traffic deaths rise

when speed limits are raised (see <https://www.consumerreports.org/car-safety/higher-speed-limits-led-to-36760-more-deaths-study-shows/>). If we had NO speed limits or any consequences for driving at dangerously high speeds, could we realistically depend on our fellow citizens' sense of personal responsibility to drive safely? I believe committee members know the answer to that question. We need to have rules because we make mistakes, and some of our mistakes cause harm to others. Growing up, I remember hearing the expression, "Your rights end where my nose begins." Yes, we want freedom – for ourselves and our own interests – but we may be less inclined to grant others the same freedom when their freedom infringes on what we consider to be OUR freedom. If YOU are free to own a gun and carry it without a permit, how free is the police officer who, during a traffic stop, has to GUESS whether or not the driver is carrying a weapon that could take the officer's life?

Lawmakers must always balance the competing interests of all citizens. No law will ever eradicate criminal behavior. It is true that a person bent on murder will always find some sort of weapon to use. However, most murders are not premeditated, but are committed in a fit of passion against a known victim with whatever weapon is most accessible (see <https://science.howstuffworks.com/life/why-do-we-kill2.htm>). Increased access to guns translates to an increase in homicides (see <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/guns-and-death/>). A kitchen knife can kill a person, but a knife is not nearly as effective as a gun. And, sadly, even a toddler can do kill someone with a gun.

We have all heard stories of toddlers gaining access to unsecured weapons and killing themselves or others. If permitless carry becomes law, wouldn't the reduction of training requirements increase the likelihood that an innocent child might gain access to a deadly weapon? Would the members of this committee be willing to take personal responsibility for the additional accidental deaths that might well result from the passage of this bill?

I have heard many times (including from one of our state legislators) the belief that our Constitution's Second Amendment is a "God-given" right. I have to wonder, when I hear such a claim, whose God gives the "right" to carry a lethal weapon. Is it not, rather, the Constitution's Bill of Rights that includes the Second Amendment, an amendment whose limitations are conveniently ignored. The right to bear arms is not, and never has been, absolute, but is granted within the context of a "well regulated militia." (See <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/second-amendment-text-context/555101/>).

There are disagreements about what "well regulated militia" actually means, but even if that phrase is completely disregarded and the *District of Columbia v. Heller* decision similarly ignored, the Second Amendment is still only one of many and must be considered within the context of the Constitution's conferred right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all citizens. When the Second Amendment infringes *my* right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, I must assert my right to demand reasonable restrictions on and protection from those who carry deadly weapons in public.

When considering whether a permitless carry bill would properly balance the rights and interests of all Ohio citizens, committee members must take into account polls indicating that the majority of Ohioans want reasonable gun restrictions (see https://www.cleveland.com/datacentral/2018/03/ohioans_want_new_gun_restricti.html). Committee members also should listen carefully and respectfully to all testimony. I trust all

committee members will listen carefully to all testimony, keeping in mind what is best for ALL Ohioans.

Thank you for allowing me to share my concerns.

Sincerely,

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