

Testimony in support of HB 455 from Shaun Steed: Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Committee – The state of Ohio currently implements Force of Law in regard to businesses posting no-gun signs. This current legislation is contradictory to Ohioan’s ability to legally obtain Concealed Handgun License (CHL) permits in that many businesses do not properly post signage that is in compliance with current regulations. In many circumstances, without my own diligent observation born from fear of prosecution, I could have easily carried a legally concealed firearm into a business that today would have the right to press charges against me regardless of whether the incident was an honest mistake due to their poor signage. In Stark county, in the Belden Village area, I have encountered numerous signs that could easily be missed by a law-abiding citizen. For example, Johnnie’s Bakery (6652 Wise Ave., Canton) has a faded and poorly posted sign in the lower corner of their front window; Value City Furniture (5577 Dressler Rd., Canton) has a faded sign posted to tinted glass that is almost invisible until you are standing right in front of it; and Giant Eagle grocery store (1800 W. State St., Alliance) is in a plaza with multiple entrances, yet only has a single sign posted at a side entrance. In all cases, had I carried my legally concealed firearm onto the premises, I could have faced prosecution despite the businesses themselves not being compliant with the bare minimums required for posting no-gun signage. And these few examples are by no means the only ones I have experienced. The burden of proof lies with the CHL permit holder to prove that the signage was poorly posted, and this would come after the incident could escalate to the authorities being called and the CHL permit holder is required to attend a court hearing to prevent a permanent charge on their record. Comparatively, if a business posts a sign for no dogs allowed, does the store owner call the police immediately and the perpetrator face a misdemeanor charge? The answer is almost always “no.” Most commonly, the store owner would ask the person to remove the dog from their store. By passing HB 455, legal CHL permit holders would be treated with the same regard as in many cases, despite the best efforts of the permit holder, the current signage can be missed and an honest mistake made.

Giving a private citizen or business the ability to haphazardly post any sign that carries the weight of law is not only unfair to law abiding citizens, but is also an unnecessary escalation of force. HB 455 is not proposing a new and radical legislation. Currently, there are 31 states that do not have Force of Law for their civilian- or business-posted no gun signage. In these states, the owners of the property or their employees or tenants simply ask the CHL permit holder to leave the premises, and only upon the permit holder’s refusal to leave can charges be pressed. By passing HB 455, Ohio would be joining these other 31 states in practicing civil, common sense over harsh and unnecessary law enforcement.

In addition to reducing the additional work load to our dedicated law enforcement, by passing HB 455, legal CHL permit holders will be granted the same respect as other citizens who may make honest mistakes. I would consider myself proud to call Ohio home with legislation such as HB 455 being passed into law.

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