

Testimony on Senate Bill 215
House Government Oversight Committee
February 16, 2022

Submitted by:
Lisa Voigt

Chair Wilkin, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to SB 215. My name is Lisa Voigt, and I am submitting this testimony as a concerned private citizen, mother of a high school student, and professor at The Ohio State University. I could speak about my own experience with a student who compulsively purchased a gun and told friends he was afraid he might use it to shoot innocent people on campus. But with gun violence, there is always a more recent story. As I was writing this, I learned of a nine-year old girl who died after being shot while she was in a truck with her family near the scene of a robbery.¹ The shooter was chasing someone who had just held him up at gunpoint at a bank. Texas passed its own Permitless Carry last September, over the objections of law enforcement and many, many citizens. Like my student, this shooter was not a murderer intending to kill that nine-year-old girl, someone who “wouldn’t obey laws anyway”—he was doing just what Stand Your Ground laws encourage in public perception: shooting at someone who had pulled a gun on him and taken his property. What might this shooter have learned from the required training for concealed carrying that could have saved this girl’s life? We’ll never know.

Here in Ohio, it is saddening and shocking that nothing has been done in response to the crowd’s cries to #DoSomething in the wake of the 2019 Dayton mass shooting, and instead you are moving forward with laws that will put more guns in public places, in the hands of people without training or a background check. In Ohio, gun deaths have increased 34% from 2010 to 2019—even more dramatically over the last two years—which is double the national trend (this breaks down to 28% increase in gun suicides and a staggering 43% increase in homicides.² As you contemplate recently introduced legislation to stop the brain drain and retain college graduates in Ohio through tax breaks and scholarships, I hope you will also consider that their own lives and safety will always weigh more heavily in the cost-benefit analysis about whether to leave Ohio.³

I urge you to oppose SB 215 because it will undoubtedly aggravate further, not decrease, the gun violence epidemic we are facing in Ohio. By eliminating the requirement for a permit and training to conceal carry in public, this bill does the exact opposite of encouraging responsible gun ownership. The bill makes it easy for those who have been charged with felonies and

convicted of misdemeanor or negligent assault and domestic violence offenses—including those who have been charged with assaulting a police officer—to conceal carry. It is anti-police and anti-public safety.

The reason I have heard articulated for passing this law is always the same: criminals will not obey a law requiring a background check and training. I have never heard an argument from bill sponsors or proponents that getting firearms training is a bad idea. In fact, they sometimes make the counterintuitive argument that without a law *more* people will get training, which presumably they think is a good thing—the argument assumes that everyone who does not have criminal intent is necessarily a responsible, highly trained gun owner. But besides the above-mentioned cases, think about the perpetrators of road rage shootings—of which there is now one every 18 hours.⁴ They presumably do not have criminal intent when they bring their guns with them in their cars. A man shot and killed a pregnant woman involved in a road rage incident in Florida, after she confronted him with a gun.⁵ The gun did not save her, but cost her and her baby their lives. I am certain that neither party left their house that day with the intention to kill someone no matter what the law says. Why in the world in the face of such daily tragedies would you tell people they don't need training or knowledge of gun laws to conceal carry a gun with them anywhere they want? How will Permitless Carry, which encourages more people to carry without training, help diminish this epidemic of deadly road rage incidents?

As a college professor, I can dispel for you the notion that course requirements, assignments, and grades are unnecessary because the good students will do the work and the bad students won't anyway. Rest assured, my students do the work because it's required. They do not know as well as I do what they need to learn and practice in order to increase their knowledge and skills. I am sure that it is for this same reason that when gun trainers comment on social media about the prospect of Permitless Carry, they are often opposed and cite cases of students who did stupid, dangerous things.⁶ A sponsor of a Permitless Carry bill in Tennessee in 2020 said much the same after discovering one of the unintended consequences of his bill, a surge in stolen guns: "It didn't cross my mind that we would have that many stupid people with weapons in their cars... These are the unintended consequences that we have an obligation to go back and fix."⁷ I hope that you will not have to live with the same regrets about unintended consequences. The risks are far graver than those my students would face for failing a course.

I have attended many hearings on bills like SB 215, and I understand the fears that the bill sponsors and proponents express: fears that they will be victims of a gun-wielding criminal and that carrying a gun is the only way to protect themselves and their loved ones. What I would like them, and you, to understand is that it is just as legitimate to fear people conceal carrying

in public without undergoing a background check or any training whatsoever. **I have a right *not* to carry a gun and I have a right to defend myself by moving away from someone who is openly carrying a firearm; I can't do this if the gun is concealed.** What about our fears that gun carriers will intentionally or unintentionally shoot us—whether because they aren't handling their firearm properly because of a lack of training, because of a misperception, because of an altercation, or because of a mental health crisis (a possibility I know all too well as an instructor of college students).

If we can agree with Justice Scalia in the *Heller* decision that the government has the authority to regulate constitutionally guaranteed rights; if the current permitting requirement is causing no harm to individuals (which no proponent has been able to demonstrate); if removing them *would* cause great deal of harm to individuals and to public safety, as has been amply demonstrated in other states⁸; and if we are currently in the midst of a public health crisis, with over 1500 Ohioans dying every year from guns⁹: then you have no reason to support SB 215. I very much hope you will consider the safety and well-being of your constituents rather than the threats and pressure of the gun lobby and reject this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Voigt

¹ https://abcnews.go.com/US/year-houston-girl-critical-condition-struck-gunfire/story?id=82901404&cid=social_twitter_abcn

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/fbi-murders-2020-data-homicides/2021/09/27/062a1e4e-1f9c-11ec-9309-b743b79abc59_story.html

³ <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2021/12/06/brain-drain-ohio-bill-would-offer-incentives-keep-students-state/8887940002/>

⁴ <https://thehill.com/policy/transportation/automobiles/558141-road-rage-shootings-kill-or-injure-someone-every-18>

⁵ <https://www.nbc4i.com/news/pregnant-hit-and-run-driver-fatally-shot-after-instigating-road-rage-incident-police-say/>

⁶ A Buckeye Firearms Facebook post I saw about a Permitless Carry bill during the last General Assembly included numerous comments describing how their experiences teaching showed them how little some gun owners—even ones who had been shooting their whole lives—knew about safely handling a gun or about the rules, laws, ethics or consequences of carrying firearms. For this reason, they expressed strong opposition to the bill.

⁷ <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/09/717178960/more-guns-in-cars-mean-more-guns-stolen-from-cars>. See also this statement by Stanford University Professor John J. Donahue III: “There are certainly beneficial uses of guns by permit holders that thwart or even deter crime, but these positive influences are outweighed by all of the ways—often not well understood—in which gun carrying elevates violent crime. In addition to any misconduct by the actual permit holder—such as the mass shooting in 2017 that killed five and wounded six others in the baggage claim area at the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood Airport—*gun carrying often leads to lost and stolen guns and occupies the time and complicates the task of law enforcement in ways that undermine their crime-fighting capacities*” (<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/arming-teachers-is-not-a-good-option/?redirect=1>, Feb. 28, 2018, my emphasis).

⁸ <https://everytownresearch.org/report/permitless-carry-carrying-a-concealed-gun-in-public-with-no-permit-and-no-training/>

⁹ <https://everystat.org/#Ohio>