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Families & Aging

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Thank you, Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LeRa Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the Finance Committee for allowing me to present the Building Safer Communities for Ohio's Children Act. This critical legislation aims to address the public health crisis of gun violence in Ohio through innovative, community-centered solutions.

According to data from Everytown, which is compiled from media reports- Children who often pull the trigger are mostly teenagers aged 14 to 17 or children aged five and under. Roughly half of the incidents involved children who shot themselves. In the other half, someone was injured or killed- most likely another child.

Almost every day in Ohio, a child under the age of 18 gains access to a loaded gun and unintentionally shoots themselves or someone else.

- On Sunday in the City of [Euclid, Ohio, a 2-year-old](#) gained access to a gun and fatally shot himself.
- ✓ State Senate District: 21
- ✓ State House District: 21ⁱ

Since the beginning of May 7, 2024, there have been over eight lives taken by gun violence. Eight lives, an average of 1 per day since the beginning of this month. This does not include individuals who may have been harmed and not fatal.

- On May 1, [Wayne Smooth \(64\) and Lundy Travis \(78\)](#) of Reynoldsburg were fatally killed. Both were found shot in their home
- ✓ State Senate District: 12
- ✓ State House District: 85
- On May 2, [Thaddeus Nutt \(26\)](#), also known as Thad of Akron's Coventry Township, crashes his car after being shot
- ✓ State Senate District: 28
- ✓ State House District: 35

- On May 2, [Najaa Ellman](#) (20) killed in South Columbus
 - ✓ State Senate District: 15
 - ✓ State House District: 1
- May 2, [Lashawn Roby](#) (37) shot in the Lee-Harvard area of Cleveland, which borders part of the area I represent.
 - ✓ State Senate District: 21
 - ✓ State House District: 22
- On May 2, [Jairyn Blackwell](#) (30) was found fatally shot in a vehicle in Cincinnati.
 - ✓ State Senate District: 8
 - State House District: 29
- On May 4, [Christie Bozman](#) (28) was fatally shot in the Cleveland Central area, again bordering the area I represent
 - ✓ State Senate District: 23
 - ✓ State House District: 20
- On May 4, [Devintre Gill](#) (30) was fatally shot inside his Cincinnati home
 - ✓ State Senate District: 8
 - ✓ State House District: 29
- On May 5, [Raheen Brown](#) (45) was fatally shot in Roseland, Cincinnati
 - ✓ State Senate District: 9
 - ✓ State House District: 26
- On May 5, an [unidentified teenager in Toledo](#), Ohio found shot in a garage
 - ✓ State Senate District: 2
 - ✓ State House District: 44
- On May 5, [one person died, and another remains in critical condition](#) after a shooting in Columbus University District near the Ohio State fairgrounds.
 - ✓ State Senate District: 25
 - ✓ State House District: 3

- On May 5, [one man died, and another was injured](#) in a drive-by shooting in Akron, Ohio.
- ✓ State Senate District: 28
- ✓ State House District 33

The Urgency of Addressing Gun Violence

In our state, gun violence continues to escalate, affecting the lives of many Ohioans, especially our youth. The approach we have taken up until now has been largely reactive. However, the Building Safer Communities for Ohio's Children Act proposes a proactive strategy rooted in public health principles, not just to manage but to reduce gun violence significantly. As you just heard, the statistics are more than just numbers; they represent lives impacted by gun violence. Each district represented here has felt the weight of these tragedies:

ⁱⁱIn each District in Ohio, the number of gun deaths increased 52% between 2012 and 2022. In 2023, more than half of the gun deaths-56%- were suicide, with half of those done by gun, with a large percentage being older adults.

As this is the finance committee, let's stress the cost of gun violence in Ohio and why this legislation is essential.

ⁱⁱⁱMore than 2,500 shootings have occurred in Ohio, which has caused a severe drain on our state economy. According to Gifford's Law Center and Based on the expenses that can be directly measured, including **healthcare costs** (\$123 million per year), **law enforcement and criminal justice expenses** (\$227 million per year), **employer costs** (\$16 million per year), and **lost income** (\$2.4 billion per year), the initial price tag of gun violence in Ohio is **\$2.7billion per year**.

When we factor in the quality of life attributed to pain and suffering (\$4.6 billion), the estimate rises to **\$7.3 billion annually**.

Remember to factor in lost business opportunities, lowered property values, and reduced tax bases.

Comprehensive Measures Proposed by the Bill

This bill introduces several groundbreaking initiatives:

1. Establishment of the Office of Firearm Violence Prevention: This office will be pivotal in coordinating efforts across the state to curb firearm-related incidents.
2. Integration of Behavioral Health Services: By integrating behavioral health services with community support mechanisms, we aim to address the root causes of violence, providing individuals with the tools they need to break free from cycles of violence.

3. Grant Programs: The legislation will facilitate grant programs to support evidence-based violence prevention services and youth development programs. These are designed to engage communities and provide essential services to at-risk people.

The Expected Impact

By implementing these measures, we anticipate a significant reduction in gun violence. This Bill and Office proposed in this legislation will save lives and enhance the quality of life across communities, fostering environments where our children can thrive safely and healthily.

As we discuss this bill today, I invite all committee members to engage in a meaningful dialogue about enhancing and supporting this legislation. It is our collective responsibility to safeguard the well-being of our constituents.

In closing, I have stood time and time again, pleading with every committee I have given sponsor testimony to at least provide me and others with opponent and proponent testimony, to provide a dialogue and space to hear stories, solutions, and possible compromise with organizations and individuals who have experience gun violence first hand, gun lobbyist organizations and more. My goal in any legislation I propose, as it deals with guns and violence, is to not punish nor pry from the hands of any legal gun owner their weapon but an opportunity to find a comprehensive way to address this issue. Only one of the bills I have presented this GA has been provided a full committee hearing, only now awaiting a vote. It would be nice if this committee, the finance committee, would be the second.

I want to echo Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words: "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." It is imperative that we, as legislators and as friends of the communities we serve, speak out and act decisively to combat gun violence. Again, thank you, Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and all the members of the Finance Committee for your attention to this urgent matter.

I look forward to collaborating with you to ensure the successful passage of the Building Safer Communities for Ohio's Children Act.

After my Joint Sponsor, we will take any questions

ⁱ<https://www.everytown.org/issues/child-teen-safety/>

ⁱⁱ <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2024/02/20/human-financial-costs-of-gun-violence-are-growing-dramatically-health-care-group-says>

ⁱⁱⁱ chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://miningquiz.com/pdf/Mass_Shootings/The-Economic-Cost-of-Gun-Violence-in-Ohio.pdf