

Ohio House Government Oversight Committee
HB 51 Opponent Testimony
Elizabeth Knighton
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Committee Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey and members of the committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to HB 51. My name is Elizabeth Knighton and I'm a resident of Ohio, former public school teacher, and parent of young children.

I wonder how many in this room could quote the opening of our state constitution. It reads: "We, the people of the State of Ohio, grateful to Almighty God for our freedom, to secure its blessings and promote our common welfare, do establish this Constitution."¹ Let me call attention to that phrase: "our *common* welfare" which is the purpose of the constitution. Article 1 goes on to present the so-called inalienable rights of state residents, the final of which is '*seeking and obtaining happiness and safety.*'

When each of you were sworn into office as elected representatives you said, "I do solemnly swear to support the constitution of the United States and the constitution of the state of Ohio...." (I listened to several recent videos of this on YouTube, so I *know* you all say the same thing.) In promising to support the Ohio constitution you therefore promised to work for our common welfare, and to defend the obtainment of safety for every Ohioan.

And yet, we are not safe. Gun deaths in Ohio are at record highs, having increased over 50% in the last decade.² Over that same period of time gun sales in Ohio have also more than doubled, as seen in annual data from the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS).³ If more guns caused safer communities, Ohio's firearm death rates would be plummeting, but this is far from the case. In fact, in 2020, doctors at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland published in the American Journal of Medicine an extensive study of gun violence in our state, and estimated that 1 in 100 Ohio children will die by gun violence. This estimate will only have increased since then.⁴ Your approach of de-regulating firearms and firearm ownership in the state have trended with an increase in the number of guns in the state and a decrease in our common welfare or safety.

HB 51 does not stand to improve the record. In fact, the Revised HB 51 recklessly changes the definition of a "dangerous ordinance" under ORC 2923.11 so that it no longer includes firearms with an overall length of twenty-six inches, making legal in our state firearms which are illegal everywhere else in the country. Will larger and more powerful guns make Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Columbus safer? Will they make our school children safer? The numbers say not.

Furthermore, Revised HB 51 ties the hands of law enforcement officers throughout the state even in simple acts such as forbidding police to cooperate with federal officials to solve crimes and in forbidding the removal of a weapon *illegally* held by someone on the federal disability list since there

1 <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-constitution/section-0.1>

2 CDC Underlying cause of death data through 2021. CDC for 2022 is not yet available.

3 Zachary Smith, "How Many Guns are in Ohio? Data is Notoriously Difficult but Here's What We Know." <https://www.cleveland.com/data/2022/05/how-many-guns-are-in-ohio-data-is-notoriously-difficult-but-heres-what-we-know.html#:~:text=The%20report%20says%20that%20this,2020%20with%20976%2C751%20background%20checks.> The FBI NICS database tracks firearm background checks and is widely used to approximate gun sale trends in the U.S.

4 [https://www.amjmed.com/article/S0002-9343\(20\)30363-6/fulltext](https://www.amjmed.com/article/S0002-9343(20)30363-6/fulltext)

is no corresponding Ohio code for this federal violation and removing the illegally-held weapon would therefore be enforcing a federal offense. Revised HB 51 would make it needlessly difficult for communities to hire skilled law enforcement personnel by disqualifying anyone who had worked in another state and happened to enforce federal gun laws. Why do you wish to undercut our police? We know from the hearing in this room before this committee on March 14, 2023 that HB51 is opposed by the Ohio Associations of Chiefs of Police, the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association, and the Ohio Mayors' Alliance. In your work to secure the safety of Ohio Residents, are not these the people to work *with*, not *against*?!

Before I conclude, let's revisit that oath of office that you each took. In it you swore to support the constitutions of *both* our country and our state. HB 51 (and its revised version) flies in the face of the US Constitution, and we know this because the Missouri law after which HB 51 was patterned was declared unconstitutional by a federal judge and the US Supreme Court refused to reinstate it. Passing HB51 would set up a lengthy and expensive legal battle for the state of Ohio, squandering our resources. Please abandon this reckless bill, uphold your promise to support *both* the constitutions of our state and our country, and then utilize concrete, constructive, and proven steps to reduce, not increase our gun deaths, and in so doing further the common welfare of all Ohioans.

Thank you, and I am glad to answer any questions that the committee members may have.