

Committees

Civil Justice
Behavioral Health
Health Provider Services



Committees:

Infrastructure
Families & Aging

Darnell T. Brewer

State Representative, Ohio House District 18

4/16/2024

Thank you, Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the Government Oversight Committee for allowing me to provide Sponsor Testimony on this critical bipartisan legislation. It aims to Establish an Ohio Task Force on Gun Violence to address gun violence in Ohio communities through conversation and innovative solutions.

The Task Force, along with this bill, is a bipartisan group of individuals, organizations, practitioners, and citizens working, talking, and learning together to find and recommend common-sense solutions to reduce gun violence in Ohio.

This idea was nothing new in March 1994. Then-Governor Voinovich, with the assistance of then-Lieutenant Governor and now-current Governor Mike DeWine, established the "Ohio Task Force on Gun Violence" through an executive order. So, this is nothing new to Ohio; this legislation is just asking for a resurgence of an "Ohio Task Force on Gun Violence."

In 1994, the Task Force consisted of 22 Ohioans from various sectors of Ohio, each with a "unique" perspective on gun violence. The Executive Order called for a report to be completed in 90 days to address various issues. A pivotal change to this Task Force will include the requirement of victims and those impacted by gun violence, stakeholders who have a vested interest in gun rights and safety, and such groups that could consist of organizations such as Mom's Demand Action and Buckeye Firearms.

This Task Force will be tasked with formalizing their commitments in a Blueprint to End Gun Violence, which will lay out strategies that can be used in reducing gun violence throughout Ohio. This Blueprint will outline key multi-agency strategies that address the root cause of gun violence and how jurisdictions across multiple levels and branches of government can mobilize and collaborate to address compelling and comprehensive solutions to gun violence.

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 establishment of a "Task Force" proposes a proactive strategy rooted in principles, not just to manage but to reduce gun violence significantly. Across our state, 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:

- **Chair Peterson** (R-91, Clinton County) has seen 24 firearm fatalities from 2017 to 2021 and a gun death rate of 8.9 per 100,000. Each number reflects a family forever changed.
- **Vice Chair Thomas and Rep. Oelslager** (R-49 & R-48, Stark County), your district has experienced 269 firearm fatalities in the same period, with a rate of 12.9 deaths per 100,000. This includes tragic incidents affecting our youth, such as the heartbreaking event involving a 7th grader named Keith Simmons, who planned a school shooting & shot himself in school.
- **Reps. Humphrey and Brown** (D-2 & D-5, Franklin County), where the gun death rate is 13.1 per 100,000, and over 1,061 lives were lost to firearm fatalities from 2017 to 2021. Efforts to counteract this include nearly \$1 million allocated to fight gun violence.
- **Rep. Cross** (R-83, Hardin County), although smaller in scale with 15 fatalities, each incident, like the tragedy in Mt. Victory, sends ripples through the community.
- **Rep. Grim** (D-43, Lucas County) faces a significant challenge with 384 firearm fatalities from 2017-2021, where teens make up the majority of the victims.
- **Rep. Isaacsohn and Rep. Seitz** (D-24 & R-30, Hamilton County), where the situation is terrible, with 703 fatalities and a gun death rate of 14.8 per 100,000, emphasizing the need for our proposed solutions.
- **Rep. Pizzuli** (R-90, Scioto County), where 44 lives were lost, and the community continues to feel the impact of each loss.
- **Rep. Skindell** (D-13, Cuyahoga County): A county that I share has the highest number among us at 1,290 firearm fatalities, a rate that underscores the crisis we face.
- **Rep. Swearingen** (R-89, Huron County), with 37 fatalities, each incident, like the shooting at the local Havana tavern, highlights the urgent need for intervention.

The Expected Impact

By creating this Task Force, we anticipate a Blueprint to address and recommend strategies for reducing gun violence. This 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 would like 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 Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and all the members of the Government Oversight Committee for your attention to this urgent matter.

I look forward to collaborating with the Chair and this committee to ensure the required hearings and passage of the creation of an "Ohio Task Force On Gun Violence." I am open to any questions.