



House Ways and Means Committee

HB 189 – Opponent Testimony

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Chairman Roemer, Vice Chair Lorenz, Ranking Member Troy and honorable members of the Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to proposed House Bill 189.

My name is Matthew Tippit. I am a licensed Social Worker and a Policy Associate for the [Children's Defense Fund-Ohio](#). Born out of the civil rights movement, our organization has been advocating on behalf of Ohio's children for more than forty years, striving to advance policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect, and ensure their access to targeted health care, quality education, and nutritional wellness. We believe that the health, safety, and lives of Ohio children are already under great threat due to gun violence and view HB 189 as a continuation and worsening of this endangerment.

HB 189 eliminates the sales and use taxes for firearms and ammunition. The bill would also provide tax incentives for firearm industry manufacturers in Ohio and provide a tax credit that would offset the federal excise tax. The [Legislative Service Commission](#) estimates that this would reduce state and local tax receipts by about \$29 million to \$49 million.

This is deeply concerning for several key reasons. First and foremost, gun violence is the number one cause of death for children and youth in the United States. In no other comparable country are firearms within even the top four causes of mortality among children. According to research from Everytown for Gun Safety, Ohio ranks 33rd worst in the nation for the strength of the current gun safety laws in our state, just three rankings away from being termed a "national failure" for weak gun policies that lead to higher rates of gun violence. In fact, spanning the last ten years of available data from 2011-2021, we know that half of all child and teen gun deaths occurred in just 10 states – and critically, one of them is Ohio. Significant [data](#) shows that where there are fewer guns, there are fewer gun deaths. HB 189 would make firearms more accessible. This in the absence of critical common-sense gun laws – like safe storage, child access prevention, and more – takes our state in the wrong direction for protecting our children and youth from gun violence in their homes and communities.

Second, CDF-Ohio believes that we should prioritize policies and resources to address critical child well-being issues, such as providing free school meals to all Ohio students to curb child hunger, addressing gaps in health care for children experiencing poverty through Medicaid continuous eligibility, or providing greater assistance to our most marginalized youth attempting to navigate challenging transitions to adulthood for instance. There are so

many issues facing children and their families before us, and the fact that we have made subsidizing gun ownership paramount is deeply concerning.

Lastly, there is one number I want to leave you with: 115. That is the number of Ohio children we have lost to preventable violence involving guns in 2023 so far. That is 115 young lives lost and we haven't even finished the year. If you add young adults aged 20-24, that number jumps up to 247. Just consider that one of those deaths of a child under the age of 18 was the death of a an infant who had not yet reached their first birthday. This cannot be our reality.

While we might disagree on the solution, I hope that we all can agree that these deaths need to be addressed. But this legislation clearly isn't a step in that direction. In a state with 115 children lost far too soon to guns, why would we make it cheaper and, therefore, easier to obtain a gun? In a state where a teenager was killed by other teenagers at a mall, why are we making it easier to get a gun and not requiring or incentivizing safe storage of these firearms? Children are dying before they get a chance to see 18, and others are losing their lives to the criminal justice system because our lax state laws to protect them made it too easy to get a gun before their brain was fully developed.

I haven't been out of high school for that long, so I can vividly remember being on a school bus riding past a crime scene, then getting to school and hearing that my friend's neighbor had been shot and his mom was the one to call the police. The person who lost their life earlier that morning was in high school as well. I was fortunate enough not to lose any friends myself during high school, but I cannot say the same for my peers. On any given day, I can easily list at least five children who lost their lives during high school that were friends of my friends. This impacts more than just children as well. Young adults aren't left out of these tragic stories either. In the past few years, I've personally lost two friends to gun violence and one of the things those losses remind me of is that a gun isn't a shield. Having a gun doesn't make anyone bulletproof. And what is a child that hasn't even made it to their first birthday supposed to do when a bullet is flying at them?

I urge you to consider a different option. Please protect children and not guns. Here are a few key baseline policies we recommend the state of Ohio take up before they consider HB 189 further.

- **Enact Secure Storage Laws.** Ohio law does not currently mandate secure storage or Child Access Prevention (CAP) requirements. Research shows that households that lock up their firearms and ammunition can [significantly reduce the likelihood of unintentional injuries by firearms among youth by as much as 85%](#). We must require that guns be stored safely so children and teens cannot access them unsupervised.
- **Implement Universal Background Checks.** Even though over 90% of Ohioans support mandatory background checks for firearm purchases, current Ohio law does not require them on unlicensed gun sales. Background checks do not prevent legal gun purchases but they could prevent child and teen gun deaths. We must extend background check requirements to cover all gun sales.
- **Reinstate Concealed Carry Permit Requirements.** In 2022, Ohio lawmakers eliminated the state's concealed carry permit requirement and all training requirements for concealed carry, even though polling data shows 88% of Ohioans support them. Research shows that relaxing concealed carry permit restrictions is significantly [correlated to an increase in gun violence](#), by about 10% in states that have done so. We need stronger concealed carry authority in Ohio.

Prohibit Firearm Access for High-Risk Groups. Common sense gun policy helps keep firearms out of the hands of those who would use them to harm children, families, communities, and even

themselves. Red Flag laws would allow family members or police to seek removal of firearms from individuals whom they fear will cause harm to themselves or others and are widely supported by 3 in 4 Ohioans.

Gun violence is a pervasive public health issue. Making firearms and ammunition more accessible will only worsen this epidemic in our state. I thank you for your time today and urge you to protect children, not guns.