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**Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
Senate Bill 78 Sponsor Testimony
Restore Local Authority to Regulate Firearms-Related Conduct
May 30, 2023**

Chair Hoagland, Vice Chair Wilson, and members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 78, To Restore local authority to regulate firearms-related conduct. This legislation is a reintroduction of Senate Bill 76 from the last General Assembly, and would return home rule to local governments to fight gun violence.

Just last week, we honored the one year anniversary of the tragedy in Uvalde, Texas. 19 innocent children and 2 dedicated educators lost their lives, an unimaginable tragedy for their community and our country.

Ohioans have endured immeasurable suffering because of preventable gun violence. In an average year, 1,602 Ohioans die, and an appalling 3,753 Ohioans are wounded by guns. The problem of injuries and death due to firearms has metastasized to unacceptable proportions.

I pray and hope we don't become numb or desensitized to the serious problem of gun violence. We cannot allow it to plague the lives of Ohioans, our young people in particular, any longer.

Our local elected officials see gun deaths and injuries far too often, and far too closely in their communities.

Cities and townships in Ohio have sought to introduce many measures to curb the impact of gun violence in their communities, but have been obstructed by measures of the Legislature. This includes safe storage requirements, bans on large-capacity magazines, penalties for failing to report the loss of a firearm, and a prohibition of selling a firearm to someone the seller knows to be unqualified to own a firearm. None of those measures amount to an infringement on an individual's right to own firearms safely or responsibly.

There is overwhelming support for gun safety legislation across the country. 90% of Americans support common sense criminal background check requirements to purchase a firearm, including 83% of gun owners. It is time to listen to the voices of the people who are asking for us to examine firearm safety legislation.

Local elected officials are deeply intertwined with their communities. They hear from their neighbors, doctors, law enforcement officers, and community social workers who confront this issue head-on. They know the specific and tailored needs of their community because of the devastation that occurs too often across our state and nation. While solutions to gun violence may not be 'one size fits all,' we must allow our local governments to fully function with legislative autonomy on this serious issue.

To quote Columbus City Council President Shannon Hardin, “The Statehouse handcuffed responsible local officials, preventing them from enacting the most basic gun safety laws.”

In April, the City of Columbus tested its safe storage law for the first time. A young child found a loaded gun left unsecured between the couch cushions in his home, picked it up to play with it, pointed it towards his head, and accidentally discharged the weapon. Thankfully, the toddler wasn’t permanently injured and suffered only burns and short-term hearing loss. The firearm owner later pled guilty to two counts of negligent storage of a firearm and one count of child endangering his own child. However, state court action has temporarily halted the City’s gun safety ordinances, and prosecutors are unable to hold accountable those responsible for minors accessing unsafely stored firearms.

In my home on the South Side of Columbus, I can hear gunshots nearly every day. The issue of gun violence is persistent in my own backyard. However, I also see parents and grandparents walking their children to school, many working multiple jobs to ensure a better future for the young people in their lives. We cannot allow preventable gun violence to rob children of their futures, or families of their children.

Life is sacred. Each life lost to gun violence is a missing part of our community. These victims are our sons, daughters, parents, neighbors, and friends. Residents and visitors alike deserve to feel safe and secure in Columbus and across all municipalities in Ohio.

It is vitally important to empower our communities to address the persistent and devastating problem of gun violence. Your affirmative consideration and support of this legislation will give local governments important tools they need. This critical legislation is needed to ensure our trusted local officials can protect the lives of all Ohio families and children.

I welcome any questions at this time.