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Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
Substitute Senate Bill 164 Sponsor Testimony
Enact the Suicide Self-Defense Act
January 23, 2024

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Wilson, and members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Substitute Senate Bill 164, the Suicide Self-Defense Act. I would also like to thank Chair Johnson for allowing the adoption of the sub-bill so that my sponsor testimony addresses the most recent version of the bill.

Guns are the most lethal method of suicide. On average, there are [132 suicides](#) per day in the U.S. [More than half](#) of them utilize a gun. In 2021 alone, there were an estimated [1.7 million](#) suicide attempts. An estimated [20 veterans](#) die daily from suicide, of which 70% involve guns. Unfortunately, Ohio's suicide death rate is [higher](#) than the national average with a rate 15.15 per 100,000 in Ohio compared to a rate of 13.93 per 100,000 nationally. In 2019, 1,806 Ohioans died by suicide, and 62% of gun deaths were suicides. Deaths by suicide or homicide are the [leading cause of premature death](#) for young people aged 10 to 24 in the United States.

Reducing access to guns [decreases the risk](#) of gun suicides and the lethality of suicide attempts. There is no other solution that can prevent more suicide deaths. During a suicide crisis, a person is not thinking clearly and may act impulsively. Suicide crises may be isolated, short-term, or recur throughout a person's life. Owning a handgun is tied to a [higher risk](#) of suicide.

Existing law does not provide a method for an individual to limit their own legal ability to receive, transport, or possess a gun due to a fear that they may become a risk to themselves. Ohioans at risk of suicide need another tool to add to their personal safety plans. My legislation, [S.B. 164](#), the Suicide Self-Defense Act, is a simple way to prevent suicide deaths. Under the bill, Ohioans will have the choice to delay the purchase of or temporarily suspend their possession of guns by voluntarily and confidentially adding themselves to a Do-Not-Possess list.

Under the bill, a person may apply to add their name to the list by mail, online, or in person. Those who add their name will be on the list a minimum on 21 days before they are able to

request the removal of their name. The Do-Not-Possess list will be maintained by the Attorney General and the list will be forwarded to the National Instant Background Check System with the F.B.I. During the time a person's name is on the list, gun dealers and law enforcement will prevent the person from having the ability to impulsively purchase or possess a gun after running a background check. Once a person requests to have their name removed, the Attorney General is required to remove them from the list after a 21-day waiting period, update the information with the F.B.I., and destroy the records of that person's registration. A person may petition the court of common pleas in the county they reside for early removal by showing that the person is not likely to act in a manner dangerous to public safety or to the person's self.

Forms to add and remove a person's name will be also made available to all county clerk of courts, to the Department of Health, the Department of Mental Health and Addition Services. Providers will be permitted to assist their patients in filling out the form and the form will indicate if a provider assists a person. Any person who falsely adds to or removes another person's name from the list will be subject to a criminal penalty of a second degree misdemeanor.

Three other states, [Washington S.B. 5553 \(2018\)](#), [Virginia S.B. 436 \(2020\)](#), and [Utah H.B. 267 \(2021\)](#), have heard the call of these terrible suicide statistics and enacted legislation similar to my bill, which allows people to prevent their impulsive purchase guns and voluntarily remove their access to guns. Additionally, a bipartisan team in Congress, including Representatives John Curtis (R-UT) and Pramila Jayapal (D-WA), introduced [H.R. 8361](#), similar legislation.

I have discussed this bill at length with several stakeholders and sought feedback from local government officials, gun advocacy groups, and professional organizations that deal with mental health crises. I hope to assemble a broad coalition to support this legislation including gun rights and gun safety groups alike. I will continue discussing this measure with stakeholders and experts in suicide prevention. I intend to reach out to the Attorney General to seek his feedback and support for his role in this bill.

I believe this bill respects and protects Ohioans' gun rights by allowing them to temporarily and voluntarily limit their right to gun ownership if they know it puts themselves in danger. It is my hope that what eventually becomes law is aimed at preventing suicide and prolonging the lives of as many Ohioans possible. Your affirmative consideration and support of this legislation will empower Ohioans at risk of suicide to utilize all the tools they can to protect themselves from a tragic, preventable death.

I welcome any questions at this time.