

Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee

Proponent Testimony SB 225

Submitted By Patricia Krummrich

To the Chair, Minority Leader and Members of the Committee,

My name is Pat Krummrich and I currently live in West Chester, Ohio near Cincinnati. For 25 years, I lived in The Akron/Canton area and was a constituent of Sen. Roegner, the author of this bill. She and I have talked several times in the past, always amicably. We disagree on some issues but I support her bill, SB 225. It is common sense to align Ohio's Designated Veterans Suicide Awareness and Prevention Day with the national Suicide Prevention Month. My thanks to Senator Roegner for introducing this bill and I appreciate the support shown by both parties for it. I also appreciate the funding approved in the state's recent budget to support the VA's message on suicide prevention.

In 2022, I lost my younger brother, Chief Warrant Officer 2nd Class, Karl Phares, when he committed suicide after suffering from PTSD for years. My brother served in a forward operation base in Afghanistan and then later in Iraq. When he returned home, his job eventually took him to a rural area where he didn't have much access to the types of VA programs that some of his other service buddies found in more populated areas. I always felt that things like drumming circles or group therapy with other service members could have led to a different outcome. As it was, one day he decided he'd had enough and before his wife, who was present, could stop him, he killed himself.

Some will say that it's the job of the VA to save veterans. Which is true but it's clearly not enough. According to the [2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#) from the US Department of Veterans Affairs, 6,392 Veterans died by suicide in 2021, reflecting an increase of 11.6% over the previous year. (1)

It's impossible to talk about preventing Veteran Suicide without talking about gun violence. According to the Military Times, the VA has zeroed in on gun safety as a way to reduce veteran suicide.

"It's a big change for us to be talking so directly about firearms," said Matt Miller, who runs the VA's suicide prevention efforts. The data had become too obvious to ignore any longer: the vast majority of people who attempt suicide do not die. A tiny fraction, only about 5% of people attempting suicide, use a gun. But guns are deadly almost every time, and so end up accounting for over half of suicide deaths. For veterans, that jumps to 75%. (2)

"The VA reports that nearly half of all Veterans own one or more firearms. Even though many Veterans are experienced with firearms due to their military training, [1 in 3 Veteran firearm owners](#) do not follow the firearm industry's recommendations for securely storing firearms in the home. Although removing firearms from the home is ideal for those at risk of suicide, practicing responsible firearm and ammunition storage serves as a crucial alternative measure in preventing suicide among US Veterans." (1)

In 2021, the VA [released](#) a suicide prevention tool kit, developed in partnership with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the National Shooting Sports Foundation, that promotes safe gun storage. "Programs to promote safe

firearm storage among service members and veterans are most effective when they are carried out by and with the community, instead of coming from outside the community without their support,” the guide reads. (3). The VA has run multiple public service messages and safety training programs in recent years. But much of that work has been publicly downplayed or curbed as the topic has frequently run into political opposition from gun rights activists and conservative lawmakers, who view the efforts as an attempt to infringe on individuals’ Second Amendment rights. (2)

So often, ANY discussion of Common Sense Gun Safety measures stirs up fears by conservative gun owners that “the other side” is going to try to take their guns away. But if we just sit down and talk together about finding some solutions that are acceptable to Ohioans on both sides of the issue, we can make some crucial, life saving progress. Let’s reduce the fear of each other’s positions and find some more Common Sense approaches, like this bill, that show Ohioans that we are working together to reduce gun suicides. As our legislators, you can model a non-partisan tone and create a culture that promotes acceptance of community programs and safety measures that reduce gun suicide.

What are some specific things you could do towards this end? Well, I would ask you to favorably consider bills like the current HB 420 and HB 421 (or a Senate version) to Declare Gun Violence a Public Health Crises and Establish A Gun Violence Task Force. Sitting down together we can find areas of agreement on Gun Safety...easy, non-partisan things that we can all support, like safe storage! If you do, I believe you will find most Ohio voters approve of such efforts.

A designated day is good, but alone, it is not enough.

Thank you for your time.

Patricia Krummrich

Footnotes:

1. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomchiodo/2024/02/22/secure-firearm-storage-key-to-preventing-veteran-suicides/?sh=52bee5f47955>
2. <https://www.militarytimes.com/veterans/2021/09/22/va-zeroes-in-on-gun-safety-as-a-way-to-reduce-veteran-suicides/>
3. <https://www.militarytimes.com/veterans/2023/10/31/how-families-want-to-address-guns-and-veteran-suicide-prevention/>

Suggested Reading:

- American Psychological Association.
<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/11/preventing-veteran-suicide>

