

Proponent Testimony in support of SB225
Senate Veterans & Public Safety Committee

Michelle Lee Heym

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Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking member Craig and members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee, thank you for allowing me to present proponent testimony for Senate Bill 225, to Designate September 22nd as Veterans Suicide Awareness and Prevention Day.

My name is Michelle Heym and I am testifying as a resident of Powell, Ohio. I am a Wife, Mother, and have been a substitute teacher for 12 years. My kids were on lockdown during Sandy Hook in a school about an hour away, after which time I became an advocate for Gun Violence Prevention and learned that when we talk about almost 44,000 deaths in the United States, suicide comprises about 25,000 people in America every year. It would be my honor to support this bill.

When we talk about Veterans, I would think they are fairly trained with the use of a gun, and may have many in their possession. One would think their experience during wartime causes many to be traumatized and their state of mental health combined with their easy accessibility to guns, may cause them to be a danger to themselves. Veterans confront unique challenges during their service and face new ones when they return to civilian life. And these challenges are not always what might be expected. While many assume that suicide in veterans is associated with their time while deployed, in fact, veterans who served during the wars in Iraq in Afghanistan who were not deployed⁶ had higher suicide rates than those who were deployed.

The bottom line is we live in a civil society and I don't want to hear of another person, let alone hero ending their life. Let's collectively honor our Veterans and help them by pursuing policies that can protect against veteran suicide, including disrupting a person's access to a firearm when they are in crisis through secure gun storage, storing a gun outside the home, and using Extreme Risk laws; raising awareness about the risks of firearm access; addressing upstream factors that can lead to veteran suicide; and ensuring that we have timely data about the basic aspects of this crisis."

Let's interrupt this cycle of gun suicide that claims lives of nearly 25,000 people in America every year. And honor our Veterans, that are not excluded from this number. We must address this public health crisis to reduce gun violence that is out of control.

In Ohio

In an average year, **1,702** people die by guns.

With a rate of **14.5** deaths per 100,000 people, Ohio has the **24th-highest** rate of gun deaths in the US.

NATIONAL

43,375 people die by guns in an average year, a rate of **13.0** deaths per 100,000 people.

Through the chair, I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

<https://everystat.org/#Ohio>

<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

<https://everytownresearch.org/issue/suicide/>

<https://everytownresearch.org/report/those-who-serve/>

SOURCE: CDC, UNDERLYING CAUSE OF DEATH, FOUR-YEAR AVERAGE: 2018–2021.

<https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2023/cdc-provisional-data-gun-suicides-reach-all-time-high-in-2022-gun-homicides-down-slightly-from-2021>

