

Written Testimony in Support of Ohio SB273

Submitted to the Ohio Senate Veterans & Public Safety Committee

Sharon Williston-Benadum, MA, LPCC-S, LICDC, SAP

Beacon Counseling Center

Westerville, Ohio

Executive Board Member & Secretary, Hold My Guns

Certified Firearms Instructor: NRA, USCCA, A Girl & A Gun

Leadership Team, A Girl & A Gun – Obetz, Ohio Chapter (Member since 2018)

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Chairman, Vice Chair, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 273. I submit this statement as a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor with a supervisory designation, a Licensed Independent Chemical Dependency Counselor, and a Department of Transportation Substance Abuse Professional. I also serve as an Executive Board Member and Secretary for Hold My Guns, a national nonprofit that partners with Federal Firearms Licensees (FFLs) to provide voluntary, temporary firearm storage during times of personal crisis. Additionally, I am a certified firearms instructor through the NRA, USCCA, and A Girl & A Gun, and I serve on the leadership team for the Obetz, Ohio chapter of A Girl & A Gun, where I have been an active member since 2018. These roles give me a unique and balanced perspective on both mental health crisis intervention and the nuances of firearms culture.

In my clinical work at Beacon Counseling Center in Westerville, I support individuals and families navigating acute stress, substance use disorders, suicidal ideation, and crisis intervention planning. These combined experiences allow me to see firsthand the practical and legal barriers that individuals face when seeking help.

As a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor and Licensed Independent Chemical Dependency Counselor, I routinely collaborate with clients to develop safety plans for use during periods of crisis escalation. These plans include recognizing warning signs, identifying supportive contacts, engaging in appropriate levels of care, and voluntarily reducing access to firearms and other lethal means. It should be noted that not all of my clients own firearms, but they may live in a household where firearms are present.

Despite these plans, many clients and their families who desire out-of-home firearm storage face a significant barrier: they do not have a safe, legal, and trusted option. Not everyone has close friends or family members, let alone those who are able or appropriate to assist in this way.

Mental health professionals cannot take possession of firearms. Additionally, some clients, including first responders, may hesitate to store personal firearms with law enforcement due to privacy or professional concerns. This resource gap can undermine an otherwise effective safety plan.

Licensed firearms retailers are uniquely positioned to meet this storage need because they have the space, security infrastructure, and the trust of gun owners. For these reasons, FFLs can serve as a reliable, discreet, community-based resource for providing this service. Additionally, for gun owners facing difficult times, as everyone does from time to time, knowing that their community cares can reduce stigma while strengthening protective factors and encouraging resilience during times of crisis.

SB 273 increases access to life-saving voluntary firearm storage by reducing liability barriers to FFLs offering voluntary firearm storage. It also protects the privacy of the FFL's customers voluntarily storing their own firearms, which increases trust and reduces hesitancy to using this service.

When collaborative options such as voluntary firearm storage exist, clinicians can offer more complete and realistic safety planning that respects both safety and personal rights.

In my role with Hold My Guns, I work directly with FFLs and community partners and assist with referrals for individuals seeking voluntary storage. Through this work, we see firsthand the willingness of firearm owners to take responsible steps during times of crisis, the desire for non-coercive, community-based safety options, and the hesitation that arises when legal liability is unclear.

As a certified firearms instructor and a long-time member and leader within A Girl & A Gun, I understand the importance of trust, autonomy, and respect within the firearms community. Many gun owners are open to temporary storage solutions when they know the process is voluntary, private, and does not carry unintended legal consequences. SB 273 provides the legal clarity that encourages participation in these programs and supports a model that aligns with both safety and personal responsibility.

On a deeper level, I have observed that a significant barrier to suicide prevention is fear, including fear of judgment, legal consequences, or the loss of one's rights or property. When individuals believe that seeking help may lead to punishment or permanent loss, they are less likely to reach out during a crisis. That hesitation can have life-altering consequences.

Voluntary firearm storage programs supported by clear legal protections offer a different pathway. They communicate that seeking help is a responsible and life-affirming choice, not a surrender of rights. They reinforce that voluntary temporary safety measures do not mean permanent loss and that trusted community partners, including Federal Firearms Licensees, can play a constructive role in supporting individuals during vulnerable moments.

From a clinical perspective, policies that preserve autonomy while providing practical options reduce these fears and increase the likelihood that individuals will engage in safety planning and implementation before a crisis escalates.

When lawmakers like Senator Koehler support voluntary, rights-respecting solutions, they create conditions in which responsible help-seeking becomes easier rather than harder. These elements strengthen the continuum of care and help ensure that individuals in crisis have multiple pathways to safety.

That difference can matter profoundly in a moment of crisis.

Closing Statement

In my work as an LPCC-S, LICDC, SAP, firearms instructor, and Executive Board Member of Hold My Guns, I see firsthand how moments of crisis can be temporary and how survival during those moments can change the trajectory of a person's life. Policies that support voluntary, temporary firearm storage give clinicians, families, and individuals a meaningful tool to help reduce risk while preserving autonomy and dignity.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to consider the mental health and public safety benefits of SB 273.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to the well-being of Ohioans.

**Sharon Williston-Benadum, MA, LPCC-S, LICDC, SAP at Beacon Counseling Center
Westerville, Ohio**

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