

Geauga County Suicide Prevention Coalition
Proponent Testimony - S.B. No. 273
Ohio House Public Safety Committee

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and Honorable Members of the Public Safety Committee:

My name is Brittain Paul, and I am the Chair of the Geauga County Suicide Prevention Coalition. Thank you for the opportunity to support S.B. No. 273, which is entitled, "Enact the Keep Them Safe Act."

The Geauga County Suicide Prevention Coalition is a group of people who partner with the community to create compassion and build hope through education, advocacy, and support for a future free from suicide. Geauga is unique in that there is a mix of both suburban and rural areas with a population that ranges from 95-96,000 people. We are the second-highest in median income as a county, yet large disparities exist that limit access to care for those who need it most. We average one or more suicides per month. Our primary focus is on men and teens and promoting safety, but we prioritize the safety and well-being of all Geauga residents. The Suicide Prevention Coalition provides community education and ongoing training and promotes access to resources.

The Geauga County Suicide Prevention Coalition is made up of community leaders who are compassionately involved in mental health, addiction recovery, veterans' services, first responders, loss recovery, and other areas of community concern.

We would like to thank Senator Koehler for introducing common-sense and straightforward legislation that may provide a lifesaving stopgap for Ohioans who are experiencing a time of despair and loss of hope. As an active and engaged coalition, we have learned that a short period of pause, as little as several minutes to an hour, inserted between a decision to complete suicide and an attempt can make a lifesaving difference. S.B. 273 can provide a critical, planned, and voluntary pause for those in need.

S.B. 273 simply creates the ability for gunowners to temporarily store their firearm(s) with a federally licensed firearms dealer or law enforcement agency under prescribed and voluntary terms. By providing immunity from civil liability for firearms dealers and law enforcement, S.B. 273 allows these organizations to confidently accept firearms for safe, temporary, responsible, and confidential storage. The legislation also provides the ability for individuals to store firearms during a critical period without loss of ownership or 2nd amendment rights and with the assurance that their firearms will be taken care of and returned to them within a short period of time. An easily accessible option must be available to those who have quick access to firearms and confidentiality for those who might face stigma with admission of a period of mental health crisis.

Here in Geauga County, and across Ohio, our deepest concerns often focus on males and veterans, but this concern extends to all community members and firearms owners who may understand their own need for a safe and temporary gun-free environment.

This legislation is supported by Second Amendment groups, firearms retailers, law enforcement, the suicide prevention community, mental health, and community partners across Ohio. S.B. 273 passed the Ohio Senate with unanimous and bipartisan support. The Geauga County Suicide Prevention Coalition urges the Ohio House Public Safety Committee to approve this legislation and bring it to a vote of the Ohio House of Representatives.

Warm Regards,

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