

Testimony on SB273

Ohio Senate Armed Service, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee

Date: October 14, 2025

Submitted by: Julia Elkus

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to submit proponent testimony for SB273, the Keep Them Safe Act to provide guidelines and civil immunity for the voluntary storage of firearms.

My name is Julia Elkus and I am a resident of Cincinnati Ohio. I have been an advocate for commonsense gun safety measures since the Columbine school shooting in 1999. Tragically and astonishingly, the CDC estimates that over 800,000 Americans have died from firearms since that time. It is the responsibility of this legislative body, as well as citizens, to do whatever we can to protect the health and well-being of Americans and minimize gun related deaths.

In 2024, there were an estimated 28,000 gun deaths by suicide nationally, representing almost 2/3 of the total 44,000 gun related deaths in the U.S. This pattern is mirrored in Ohio, where in 2023, three of five firearm deaths were suicides. Firearms are a uniquely lethal means of suicide. Data shows the survival rate for suicide attempts by firearm is extremely low, with approximately 90% of attempts resulting in death. This compares with less than 5% of suicide attempts resulting in death for all other methods combined. If an individual attempts suicide using a firearm, they almost never get a second chance at life.

According to VA statistics, suicide rates among vets are more than twice that of the general population. Particularly tragic is that the age group at most risk for suicide among vets are young men ages 18 – 34 who have the entirety of their adult lives ahead of them. I am grateful to Representative Koehler for his sponsorship of this legislation that offers veterans and others who feel they are at risk for suicide to reduce that risk by safely storing their firearms with a third party while they seek counsel or take other steps to address their well-being and mental health. This commonsense approach to removing the most lethal of suicide mechanisms has

the opportunity to save lives and reduce the sobering number of deaths by suicide in Ohio. I urge the Committee to vote yes on SB273, and I look forward to seeing it passed into law. I also urge the Committee to pass an Extreme Risk Protection Order bill that would **serve the same purpose as SB273 of removing firearms as the most lethal source of suicide for those at risk**. These laws allow loved ones or law enforcement to petition a court for an order to temporarily prevent someone in crisis from accessing guns. In many cases, individuals suffering from a mental health crisis do not have the self-awareness to initiate safe storage, but their loved ones recognize the risk. ERPO legislation addresses this reality and serves as an additional means of saving the lives of our veterans and others.