

Testimony on House Sub Bill 248
House Federalism Committee
November 18, 2020
Submitted by Shela Blanchard

Chair Becker, Vice Chair Stolutzfus, Ranking Member Miller and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to House Sub Bill 248. My name is Shela Blanchard and I am speaking to you today as a concerned private citizen and volunteer for Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. Founded after the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012, Moms Demand Action is a nonpartisan organization with over six million supporters, both mothers, fathers, gun owners and non-gun owners. We do not oppose guns or the Second Amendment, but rather advocate for the reduction of gun violence through common-sense, widely supported gun safety reforms and education.

I am a federal employee for the Armed Services, where I proudly serve supporting our war fighters, and a survivor of gun violence. I joined Moms Demand Action one year ago after the events occurred in the Dayton Oregon District. Nine lives were taken from us senselessly, my niece being one of them. The 3 am phone call from her mother has changed my life forever. Today, I remain in disbelief and as legislation continues to be introduced to relax our gun laws, I know it will only be a matter of time before the next event occurs. I stand before you today as a concerned mother, auntie, sister, friend and advocate for common sense weapon reform. This Sub Bill 248 is the complete opposite of common sense.

We have been in a pandemic since March, and gun violence across the nation is increasing. Suicides are rising in Ohio, there is an increased risk of domestic abuse, and we have hit a critical moment in homicides. In light of these unprecedented times a bill such as HB248 is being introduced. I believe a better way to save lives, and to address our gun violence public health crises, would be to figure out how and why guns are so easily accessible? With that being said I have some questions for you to consider directly from a few of the proposals in this bill. My family and friends would like to know:

How does allowing more people to carry firearms in a school safety zone and reducing penalties for concealed carry violations in a school safety zone keep our children of Ohio safe? When in fact allowing guns in schools increases the risk of gun violence.^[1]

How does prohibiting public universities from restricting concealed carry among students, keep our students, our children, your children, staff and faculty safer? When there is no evidence that allowing guns on campuses reduces crime or makes campuses safer.^[2]

How does lowering the minimum age to acquire a concealed weapons license from 21 to 18 years of age, keep our children and communities safer? An 18-year old barely has the critical thinking skills developed to operate a motor vehicle properly, and the sponsors of this bill believe it ok for them to acquire a concealed carry license. When in fact minimum age laws can help prevent young people and those around them from falling prey to preventable gun violence and suicide.^[4]

How does allowing people to carry firearms while they are drinking alcohol make our small business owners feel safer about operating in the state of Ohio? We know firearms already make for a tense environment and given our current social climate this does not seem to be legislation steeped in the reality of what would create a safer community.

As a sister, mother, auntie, friend and concerned citizen, I am appalled and fearful of the provisions I've noted in this bill and of the Ohio I would have to live in if it were enacted. I'm worried about my great nieces, nephews, friends' children and grandchildren as they attend school and encounter others at sporting events or the grocery store. Our teachers are essential frontline workers, and this bill does nothing to protect them or their students at any level of education.

Since the Dayton mass shooting in August 2019, my family has been, and other Ohioans have been, waiting for the legislature to do something. We received broken promises, more guns in our communities, and more legislation to give trigger-happy vigilantes increased authority to shoot and kill more people of color without fear of prosecution.

Between 2009 and 2018, gun deaths increased 54% in Ohio compared to 18% nationwide. In Columbus alone as I write this we are at an all-time high of homicides. Sub House Bill 248 would do nothing to reduce gun violence and includes many dangerous proposals that have been shown to increase it by encouraging more people to carry guns in more places.

Sub HB248 could lead to an increase in suicides, homicides, and more teachers and students' deaths. I appeal to you, as you ponder moving this dangerous bill forward, to consider the questions I ask on behalf of my family and friends above. In your response, please remember all citizens of Ohio, not just those of your district. Sub House Bill 248 will affect the lives of every Ohioan, even more so in our urban districts. Property can be restored, but a life taken cannot.

I thank you for your time and ask that you vote no in moving this bill forward from committee.

^[1] <https://everytownresearch.org/issue/guns-in-schools#what-is-the-problem>

^[2] <https://everytownresearch.org/solution/guns-on-campus/>

^[3] <https://tinyurl.com/ETSchoolSafety>

^[4] <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/who-can-have-a-gun/minimum-age/>