

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

Opponent Testimony HB 227

Regarding Concealed Weapons

House Government Oversight Committee

Thank you, Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair White, and Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the Senate Health Committee. My name is Jerry Freewalt. I am the Executive Director of the Catholic Conference of Ohio. The Conference is the official representative for the Catholic Bishops of Ohio in matters of public policy. We have two concerns regarding HB 227. In raising these concerns, we are not contesting the right to responsible gun ownership.

Along with many other faith communities, we are concerned with the removal of requirements for persons to carry a concealed deadly weapon without a license. Our Church has historically supported reasonable regulations and limitations on handguns. Current licensure provisions are prudent and promote the common good.

We are also concerned with the provision that would require houses of worship to **allow** concealed handguns to be carried in our churches unless they post signs specifically *prohibiting* such carry. Current Ohio law **prohibits** the carrying of a concealed handgun in any church, synagogue, mosque, or other place of worship, unless the church, synagogue, mosque, or other place of worship permits and/or posts a sign *allowing* concealed carry.

We did not ask for this change. The current law is working. It already balances religious liberty with second amendment rights. The Catholic Church believes that religious communities should decide what is appropriate to bring into their spaces of worship. Houses of worship are customarily weapons-free. Churches should be places where worshippers, especially parents and children, can confidently expect an atmosphere of peace and safety where people are presumed not to be carrying weapons, legitimately or otherwise.

Catholic parishes in the State of Ohio, in collaboration with their local communities, and under the guidance of their pastors, are best equipped to exercise prudential judgment as to what is best for the safety of their parish communities. Requiring the 766 Catholic churches in Ohio to post signs prohibiting deadly weapons is an unnecessary and unwanted burden.

We ask that the current prohibition remain in law.