

Opposition Testimony on Senate Bill 215  
Veterans and Public Safety Committee  
Sen. Frank Hoagland, Chair  
Sen. Terry Johnson, Vice Chair  
Sen. Cecil Thomas, Ranking Member  
Dec. 14, 2021

Submitted by:

Deborah Cooper

Thank you, Chair Hoagland, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and committee members, for considering this testimony on the “permitless carry” bill, SB 215. This legislation would expand the ability to carry concealed handguns to certain criminals and people charged with crimes who cannot currently obtain such a license. Ohioans have heard legislators tell us time and again that gun laws only penalize law-abiding citizens. If this is the case then there is no reason to change who may obtain a CCW license.

As a private citizen, I believe this bill would not only increase gun violence risks for me, my family, my neighbors, and law enforcement officers, but would also infringe the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that underlies our Constitution and its amendments.

Several years ago, I attended opponent testimony hearings and heard statements from those familiar with firearms who understand the likely (dire) consequences of passing a permitless carry bill. We know that, when the Missouri legislature eliminated laws requiring a permit to buy a firearm, the state saw a 25 percent increase in its homicide rate (see <https://www.sciencealert.com/scientific-evidence-that-strict-gun-control-works-saves-lives>). Does our legislature REALLY want to endanger more Ohioans just so a few people can avoid the obligations that should come with a right to carry a lethal weapon? We don't allow people to carry bombs or drive military tanks. In the military, where guns, bombs and tanks are used in specific ways, under scrutiny, and with extensive training, why should we assume that ordinary citizens are mature and skilled enough to responsibly own and care for a weapon, without permit or training requirements?

During the 2019 permitless carry hearings, one committee member stressed the importance of personal responsibility. But even if most gun owners fully understand their obligation to get adequate training, to properly secure their weapons, and to use them only when absolutely necessary and without harming any innocent lives, can we really trust that all of them will follow gun safety rules if there is no requirement to do so?

An argument I've heard from those advocating for a relaxing of restrictions on guns owners is that a person with evil intent will find a way to get a gun a whether or not it is legal to do so. This is certainly true. We have speed limits, but citizens frequently disregard those limits. Does this mean we should have no speed limits and no consequences for ignoring them? In fact, traffic deaths rise when speed limits are raised (see <https://www.consumerreports.org/car-safety/higher-speed-limits-led-to-36760-more-deaths-study-shows/>). SB215 would permit Ohioans without any training in the use of guns to carry a concealed handgun and sneak up on others. Handguns require more skill to use properly than a car and are at least as lethal. According to The U.S. Department of

Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (June 3, 2020), there were 38,680 fatalities from car crashes, while guns kill roughly 35,000 people every year. Before obtaining a driver's license, Ohio law includes classroom time, on-the-road practice with an instructor, 50 hours of on-the-road experience with a licensed citizen as well as a written test and driving exam, over a minimum of six months time. I've not heard of any legislation changing the requirement of obtaining a driver's license to zero hours and no exams. And that's for the sake of safety on the road. Legislation regarding concealed carry and who may obtain a license should be about safety, and not about rushing to put guns in the hands of more citizens and criminals.

If YOU are free to own a gun and carry it without a permit, how free is the police officer who, during a traffic stop, has to GUESS whether or not the driver is carrying a weapon that could take that officer's life?

Lawmakers must always balance the competing interests of all citizens. No law will ever eradicate criminal behavior. A person bent on murder can always find some sort of weapon to use, but some weapons are more effective than others at getting the job done, and very quickly. Further, most murders are not premeditated, but are committed in a fit of passion against a known victim with whatever weapon is at hand (see <https://science.howstuffworks.com/life/why-do-we-kill2.htm>). Increased access to guns translates to an increase in homicides (see <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/guns-and-death/>). A kitchen knife can kill a person, but we know a knife is not nearly as effective as a gun. Sadly, even a toddler can kill a person with a gun.

We have all heard stories of toddlers gaining access to unsecured weapons and killing themselves or others. If permitless carry becomes law, we can expect it will be more likely that an innocent child will gain access to a deadly weapon. Would the members of this committee be willing to take personal responsibility for the additional accidental deaths that likely would result from this bill's passage?

I have heard many times (including from one of our state legislators) that our Constitution's Second Amendment is a "God-given" right. I have to wonder, when I hear such a claim, whose God gives the "right" to carry a lethal weapon. Is it not, rather, the Constitution's Bill of Rights that includes the Second Amendment, an amendment whose limitations are conveniently ignored? The right to bear arms is not, and never has been, absolute. It was granted within the context of a "well regulated militia." (See <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/second-amendment-text-context/555101/>).

There are disagreements about what "well regulated militia" actually means, but even if that phrase is completely disregarded and the *District of Columbia v. Heller* decision similarly ignored, the Second Amendment is still only one of many and must be considered within the context of the Constitution's conferred right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all citizens. When the Second Amendment infringes *my* right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, I must assert my right to demand reasonable restrictions on and protection from those who carry deadly weapons in public.

When considering whether a permitless carry bill would properly balance the rights and interests of all Ohio citizens, committee members must take into account polls indicating that the majority of Ohioans want reasonable gun restrictions (see

[https://www.cleveland.com/datacentral/2018/03/ohioans\\_want\\_new\\_gun\\_restricti.html](https://www.cleveland.com/datacentral/2018/03/ohioans_want_new_gun_restricti.html)).  
Elected officials are, after all, paid to represent Ohioans! I trust committee members will listen carefully to all testimony, keeping in mind what is best for ALL our citizens.

Thank you for allowing me to share my concerns.

Sincerely,

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