

Testimony on Senate Bill 215
Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee
December 12, 2021

Submitted by:
Lisa Voigt

Chair Hoagland, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to present this testimony in opposition to SB 215. My name is Lisa Voigt, and I am speaking to you today as a concerned private citizen, mother of a high school student, a professor at The Ohio State University, and a volunteer for the Ohio chapter of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. I just returned last night from a semester teaching at Yale University as a Visiting Professor. As happy as I am to be home, I am sorry to have left a state that takes responsible gun ownership so much more seriously than Ohio, and that as a result is a significantly safer from gun violence. In the wake of the Sandy Hook school shooting in 2012—nine years ago today—Connecticut passed comprehensive gun safety legislation like Extreme Risk Protection Orders and Background Checks on all gun sales, which has contributed to it being one of the safest states in the country with respect to gun violence: Connecticut has the 43rd-highest rate of gun violence in the US, while Ohio has the 20th-highest.¹ Connecticut has *less than half* (5 per 100,000) the national average (11.7 per 100,000) of gun deaths, and homicides in the state *decreased* 28% from 2010 to 2019. By contrast, in Ohio—where nothing has been done in response to the crowd’s cries to #DoSomething in the wake of the 2019 Dayton mass shooting—gun deaths have *increased* 34% from 2010 to 2019, which is *double* the national average (this breaks down to 28% increase in gun suicides and a staggering 43% increase in homicides; this increase will not doubt be much higher when the 2020 surge in gun homicides is taken into account²). If you care more about economic cost than lives lost, the difference is pretty dramatic, too: gun deaths and injuries cost Ohio \$11 billion/year, and Connecticut only \$1 billion (Ohio is 3 times the population of Connecticut, not 11 times). Which state is moving in the right direction? Where would you feel safer? As you contemplate recently introduced legislation to stop the brain drain and retain college graduates in Ohio through tax breaks and scholarships, I hope you will also consider that their own lives and safety will always weigh more heavily in the cost-benefit analysis about whether to leave Ohio.³

I urge you to oppose SB 215 because it will undoubtedly aggravate further, not decrease, the gun violence epidemic we are facing in Ohio. By eliminating the requirement for a permit and training to conceal carry in public, this bill does the exact opposite of encouraging responsible gun ownership. The bill makes it easy for those who have been charged with felonies and

¹ <https://everystat.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Gun-Violence-in-Connecticut-4.21.2021.pdf>;
<https://everystat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Gun-Violence-in-Ohio-2.9.2021.pdf>

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/fbi-murders-2020-data-homicides/2021/09/27/062a1e4e-1f9c-11ec-9309-b743b79abc59_story.html

³ <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2021/12/06/brain-drain-ohio-bill-would-offer-incentives-keep-students-state/8887940002/>

convicted of misdemeanor or negligent assault and domestic violence offenses—including those who have been convicted of assaulting a police officer—to conceal carry. It is anti-police and anti-public safety.

The reason I hear articulated for passing this law is always the same: criminals will not obey a law requiring a background check and training. Since I have never heard an argument from bill sponsors or proponents that getting firearms training is a bad idea—in fact, they sometimes make the counterintuitive argument that without a permit requirement *more* people will get training, which presumably they think is a good thing—the argument assumes that everyone who does not have criminal intent is necessarily a responsible, highly trained gun owner. We have just seen, in the parents of Oxford school shooter, that this is far from the case: even those without criminal intent may be criminally liable for homicide. Most perpetrators of road rage shootings—of which there is one every 18 hours!⁴—presumably do not have criminal intent when they bring their guns with them in their cars.

As a college professor, I can dispel for you the notion that course requirements, assignments, and grades are unnecessary because the good students will do the work and the bad students won't anyway. Whether at Yale or Ohio State, rest assured, my students do the work because it's required. They do not know as well as I do what they need to learn and practice in order to increase their knowledge and skills. I am sure that it is for this same reason that when gun trainers comment on social media about the prospect of Permitless Carry, they are uniformly opposed and cite cases of students who did stupid, dangerous things.⁵ A sponsor of a Permitless Carry bill in Tennessee in 2015 said much the same after discovering one of the unintended consequences of his bill, a surge in stolen guns: "It didn't cross my mind that we would have that many stupid people with weapons in their cars... These are the unintended consequences that we have an obligation to go back and fix."⁶ I hope that you will not have to live with the same regrets about unintended consequences. The risks are far graver than those my students would face for failing a course.

⁴ <https://thehill.com/policy/transportation/automobiles/558141-road-rage-shootings-kill-or-injure-someone-every-18>

⁵ A Buckeye Firearms Facebook post I saw about a Permitless Carry bill during the last General Assembly included numerous comments describing how their experiences teaching showed them how little some gun owners—even ones who had been shooting their whole lives—knew about safely handling a gun or about the rules, laws, ethics or consequences of carrying firearms. For this reason, they expressed strong opposition to the bill.

⁶ <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/09/717178960/more-guns-in-cars-mean-more-guns-stolen-from-cars>. See also this statement by Stanford University Professor John J. Donahue III: "There are certainly beneficial uses of guns by permit holders that thwart or even deter crime, but these positive influences are outweighed by all of the ways—often not well understood—in which gun carrying elevates violent crime. In addition to any misconduct by the actual permit holder—such as the mass shooting in 2017 that killed five and wounded six others in the baggage claim area at the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood Airport—*gun carrying often leads to lost and stolen guns and occupies the time and complicates the task of law enforcement in ways that undermine their crime-fighting capacities*" (<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/arming-teachers-is-not-a-good-option/?redirect=1>, Feb. 28, 2018, my emphasis).

I have attended many hearings on bills like SB 215, and I understand the fears that the bill sponsors and proponents express: fears that they will be victims of a gun-wielding criminal and that carrying a gun is the only way to protect themselves and their loved ones. What I would like them, and you, to understand is that it is just as legitimate to fear people conceal carrying in public without undergoing a background check or any training whatsoever. I have a right *not* to carry a gun and I have a right to defend myself by moving away from someone who is openly carrying a firearm; I can't do this if the gun is concealed. What about our fears that gun carriers will intentionally or unintentionally shoot us, whether because they aren't handling their firearm properly due to a lack of training, because of a misperception, because of an altercation, or because of a mental health crisis (a possibility I know all too well as an instructor of college students)?

If we agree with Justice Scalia in the *Heller* decision that the government has the authority to regulate constitutionally guaranteed rights⁷; if the current permitting requirement is causing no harm to individuals (which no proponent has been able to demonstrate); if removing them *would* cause great deal of harm to individuals and to public safety, as has been amply demonstrated in other states⁸; and if we are currently in the midst of a public health crisis, with over 1500 Ohioans dying every year from guns⁹: then you have no reason to support SB 215 and every reason to oppose it. I very much hope you will consider the safety and well-being of your constituents rather than the threats and pressure of the gun lobby and reject this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Voigt

⁷ As Justice Scalia stated in the *Heller* decision, "like most rights, the right secured by the Second Amendment is not unlimited" and it is "not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose." <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/07-290.ZO.html>

⁸ <https://everytownresearch.org/report/permitless-carry-carrying-a-concealed-gun-in-public-with-no-permit-and-no-training/>

⁹ <https://everystat.org/-/Ohio>