

Testimony on House Bill 178
House Federalism Committee
Rep. John Becker, Chair
Rep. Reggie Stoltzfus, Vice Chair
Rep. Adam C. Miller, Ranking Member

Submitted by:

Brenda R. Clark

Chair Becker, Vice Chair Stoltzfus, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the Federalism Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony on House Bill 178. My name is Brenda Clark and I am speaking to you today as a concerned private citizen, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, retired K-12 educator, a *gun owner*, and current professor at The Ohio State University where I teach in the College of Public Health. Although I will be using public health in my testimony today, I need to be clear in stating that I am speaking on my own behalf as a private citizen and not as a representative of OSU.

Allow me to start by sharing a conversation I had recently with my daughter-in-law during an hour-long car ride to my grandson's soccer game. I asked if she had heard about HB 178, a bill that would allow people to carry a gun in public without a permit AND without any safety training. Being a working mother of 3 young children, my very busy daughter-in-law typically prefers to focus her attention on her family and to leave the politics to someone else. But this time her reaction was different. In shocked disbelief, she burst out: "What?!" You gotta be kidding me!! Why - why would they do that?! What can I do?"

She asked really important questions: Why? Why do we need this bill? And if this bill is so important, why haven't we heard more about it?

At that point, I realized that my daughter-in-law is likely only ONE of thousands of your constituents across this state who have absolutely no idea that while they are going to work and managing hectic family lives every day, their representatives in the Ohio legislature are trying to pass a law with provisions that we know - and I would expect all of

you to know – that most people oppose. In fact, 88% of Americans think you should get a permit before carrying a concealed handgun in public¹. Further, in a recent national survey conducted by the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research²:

83% of gun owners

83% of Republicans

84% of Independents

87% of Democrats

agreed “...that a person who can legally carry a concealed gun should be required to pass a test demonstrating they can safely and lawfully handle a gun in common situations they might encounter.”

That would leave roughly only about 15% of all of us – regardless of political affiliation or of gun ownership – in support of legislation eliminating permits and safety training for concealed carry. I would respectfully ask that members of this committee as well as all sponsors and co-sponsors of HB 178 reflect on these numbers and the values they represent. This should prompt you to wonder if your constituents – if you were to ask them – would agree that they would definitely feel safer when:

-attending worship services

-eating out

-going to a festival

-taking in a movie

-cheering on their favorite team at a sporting event

-or just getting groceries

knowing that they may be surrounded during those everyday public activities by people carrying a firearm, who have had no safety training in the use of that weapon “...in common situations they might encounter,” or for that matter, no education about what the law dictates about that use.

If you must answer “No,” then the question is “Why SHOULD HB 178 be passed?”

Can we make the case that even if people don't feel safer, that they actually would be safer? A look at what has happened in states that have passed permitless carry legislation shows instead a substantial increase in firearm violence:

- Alaska (first state to enact permitless carry legislation)
 - **82% increase** in aggravated assaults by firearm (2003-2017)^{3,4}
- Arizona
 - **39% increase** in aggravated assaults by firearm (2010-2017)^{5,6}
- Missouri
 - **25% increase** in aggravated assaults by firearm (2016-2017)⁷
 - **Just in one year**

You don't have to be a trained public health professional to understand what might cause these increases. Permitless carry dramatically lowers the bar for anyone who can carry a concealed handgun in public to include in some cases:

- violent criminals and weapons offenders
- people with dangerous histories
- teenagers
- people who have no firearm training at all

Since permitless carry not only fails to make us safer, but actually is associated with an increase in firearm violence, I can find no reason to conclude that HB 178 **SHOULD** be passed.

That, however, brings up another question:

Given that we are lacking sound reasons why HB 178 **SHOULD** be passed, why **WOULD** it be passed? Why would a bill that would put more guns into the hands of more people who know less about how to safely and properly use them even be considered?

This is a question I ponder in light of the fact that Ohio's gun death rate is already increasing – over 30% since 2014⁸. Notably, Ohio's gun death rate surged ahead of the

overall US rate in 2015 and has been increasing faster than the US rate for the last three years⁹.

I ponder this question:

- as a grandmother and great-grandmother with 10 grandkids in preschool – college. After the Parkland massacre, my kindergarten-age granddaughter asked my daughter-in-law, “This isn’t going to happen in my school, is it Mommy?”
- as a former high school teacher where I spent my last year (SY1996-1997) in the classroom this way: 8th period of each school day, the first thing I did was to check to be sure the student who sat in the last seat of the first row was present. Without going into great detail, this student had known violent tendencies, and if his name was not on the absence list for that day, I had to immediately call the main office, at which point they would have put the school on lock down and conducted a search until they found the missing student. This was pre-Columbine. I have grieved with each senseless mass shooting, but especially those that have taken the lives of innocent school children.
- as a current college professor. I was in the classroom the day of the attack on OSU campus in November of 2016. We were so fortunate that injuries were not like those we’ve seen on other college campuses.
- as a resident of the city of Westerville, a community that knows firsthand the horror and heartbreak of losing two beloved police officers, Eric Joering and Anthony Morelli, to gun violence. Had this confrontation occurred in public, under permitless carry, these officers would have had no way of knowing whether the shooter could lawfully carry a firearm and thus no way of arresting him.
- and finally, as a responsible gun owner. Knowing many others like myself, I fully embrace the importance of training and how essential it is for the police to know who can legally carry a gun or not, in order to be able to enforce our laws and keep us safe. Requiring a permit to conceal carry my gun in public—if I were to choose to do so—does nothing to inhibit my constitutional rights, and rather is essential to respect the rights of others to public safety.

Why **WOULD** we pass a bill that increases the chances that senseless tragedies will not only continue to occur but are likely to occur at increasing rates? That's a question I hope this committee will seriously consider.

Respectfully,
Brenda R. Clark

References:

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9. <https://wonder.cdc.gov/mcd-icd10.html>