

Thank you members of the committee, Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John and Ranking Member Kelly for allowing us to testify on behalf of HB 360, designating June as Gun Violence Awareness Month.

Gun violence is a public health epidemic here in the United States. It has life lasting effects on victims, their families, and their communities. The goal of this bill is to facilitate conversations about how we can work to end gun violence here in Ohio.

The number of firearm deaths in the country is continuing to rise at alarming rates. In 2020, 45,222 people died from gun-related injuries according to the CDC. This is a 14% increase compared to 2019.

One aspect of gun violence that often is not talked about, is the increase in suicide risk when there is a firearm present. This disproportionately affects men, veterans, and women in domestic violence situations.

Suicide Risks for Men and Military Veterans

A Stanford University study found that the presence of a firearm in a home increases the risk of suicide. Specifically, men who own handguns are 8 times more likely to die of suicide by firearm than men who do not own a handgun. In addition, according to the Department of Defense, 64% of suicide deaths among veterans included a firearm.

Domestic Violence Victim Risks

As we work to protect women from domestic violence situations here in Ohio, we need to consider the risks of the presence of a firearm in a domestic violence situation. This makes it five times more likely that the woman will be killed, according to the Giffords organization.

Youth Suicides

We have seen multiple stories about the alarming rate of suicides in young adults. A recent report done by Everytown for Gun Safety found that children and teens are dying from suicide by firearm at the highest rate in over 20 years. In just one year from 2019 to 2020, suicide by firearm increased 31% in children ages 10 to 14. From 2011 to 2020, it was a 146% increase. As we continue to discuss the rise in mental health problems in youth, we need to highlight the dangers of firearms.

Raising awareness through sharing statistics like these, as well as personal stories is the first step in ending gun violence. Increasing awareness means talking about how we can reduce gun violence as a whole, whether it is through sensible gun laws, advocating for responsible gun ownership, or increasing mental health access.

Thank you again for your time, and I urge you to support this bill to help reduce and ultimately eliminate all of the above risks for gun owners and their communities. I am happy to answer any questions.