

Written Testimony Opposing HB 51  
Mary Miller

***I respectfully re-submit the following testimony originally given to the House Government Oversight Committee on 3/14/23. In addition, I would like to express my profound disappointment with the committee for continuing hearings on HB51. I said it then, and I will say it again, this bill is a “stinker” and will cost Ohioans money and, more importantly, lives.***

Good afternoon, Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Forhan and Government Oversight Committee. My name is Mary Miller and I am from Novelty, Ohio located in the great Geauga County where I have lived my entire adult life. I am a past trustee of Rainbow Babies and Children’s Hospital located in Cleveland and spent a portion of my tenure there as a volunteer advocating for the children of Ohio at the state and national level.

If I may, I would like to begin my remarks by saying I have never so keenly felt the privilege of being a citizen of the United States and a participant in our representative democracy as I do at this moment. It has been my pleasure over the past weeks to speak with many of your staff about HB 51 and to a person they have all been delightful. I would like to thank them and all of you for the work that you do for the citizens of Ohio.

Mr. Chairman, I know, love and respect many responsible gun owners. I am currently safely storing shotguns in my own home. I am a member of a family that believes important rites of passage, such as baptisms, weddings, even memorial services, should be scheduled around hunting season.

And yet, I am here today to voice my opposition to HB 51. Mr. Chairman, HB 51 is bad law and has been shown to be bad law by the federal district court that struck down the same law enacted by Missouri. In fact, during proponent testimony, members of this committee have described that law as, “difficult to parse through,” and, because of its punitive language, having “a chilling effect on the ability for law enforcement to do their job.” I especially appreciated the comments from Representative Isaacsohn, who pointed out the irony of a self-described “recovering politician” from Missouri coming to Columbus to say that Ohioans shouldn’t listen to politicians from other states tell us how to conduct our business but we should listen to the gentleman from Missouri. Watching from home, I, too, was not only struck by the irony, I felt the intelligence of Ohioans was being insulted.

The gentleman from Missouri also declared that it was common knowledge that certain members of law enforcement weren’t, I believe his exact words were, “Big on the second amendment.” I recognize it speaks to my privilege when I tell this committee I have not had a lot of interactions with law enforcement, but I do know many of the fine members of the Russell Township Police Department and what I know for sure is, they are “Big” on protecting and serving my community and enforcing the laws of our constitution fairly and to the best of their ability within the parameters set down in it. I think it is safe to say, our police and first responders are “Big” on the constitution in its entirety, and do not believe one amendment carries any more weight than another. The same can be said of Justice Antonin Scalia who, in his comments on District of Columbia Vs. Heller, stated, “Like most rights, the right secured by the Second Amendment right is not unlimited.... [It is] not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner.” HB 51 puts the second amendment on anabolic steroids.

As I mentioned earlier, I am a past trustee of Rainbow Babies and Children’s Hospital in Cleveland. Recently, I listened as Dr. Edward Barksdale, Chief Pediatric Surgeon at Rainbow, and president of the American Pediatric Surgery Association, talked about what they are seeing in the pediatric ER. He told us that last year they saw 70 children under the age of 16 with gunshot wounds. Of those, nearly 20 returned with a second. That number, he told us, represents not just victims of urban gun violence but of suburban and rural suicide attempts and accidental gunshot wounds. Mr. Chairman, we have a gun problem in our state. HB 51 severely impinges upon the ability of state and local law enforcement to protect and serve our citizens and will make us all less safe.

Mr. Chairman, let me bring it down to brass tacks, Ohio taxpayers are stretched thin. I know you all know this very well, and take the responsibility you have as stewards of taxpayer dollars seriously. If HB 51 is passed we will be exposed to a protracted, expensive legal battle and because of what we now know has become of the Missouri law, we can be certain Ohio is very likely to lose that battle. I believe there are other things that can be accomplished by the General Assembly that have been data proven to improve public safety, such as programs that go into our communities, rural and urban, to educate folks about safe firearm storage, buy back programs, and legislation that will, once and for all, close loopholes in current laws on gun sales.

Thank you, Chairman Peterson, and the committee, for your time, and again, for your service to Ohioans.