

Roberta DiMezza

From: Melissa Carden <melissa@ricagv.org>
Sent: Monday, March 11, 2024 2:40 PM
To: House Judiciary Committee
Subject: Testimony in Support of H7373 and H7217

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March 11, 2024

RE: Support of House Bills H7373 and H7217

Chairman Craven and Members of the House Judiciary:

I am writing in support of Rep. Caldwell's secure storage bill (7373) and Rep. Knight's assault weapons ban (7217).

Below is a recent opinion piece I wrote that was published in the Feb. 10 issue of the Providence Journal in support of these two bills:

Valentine's Day marked six years since the Parkland massacre, when 14 students and three staff members were slaughtered on a day that we traditionally celebrate love. The shooter used a legally purchased AR-15, a lethal military-style rifle often used in mass shootings, including at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, when 25 lives were brutally taken. The majority were children between six and seven years old. These weapons are legal in Rhode Island.

We must ask ourselves if we want to be the state where people come to buy these deadly weapons, or rather join our neighbors in Massachusetts and Connecticut and ban them. Many have said that we won't ban these weapons until we experience a mass shooting. We refuse to accept that.

While mass shootings dominate media coverage, they represent a small minority of shooting incidents. The vast majority of gun violence is the everyday kind, known as community violence, which typically occurs among people who know each other and disproportionately impacts communities of color. As a society we must address all forms of gun violence.

Polling shows that 70.5% of Rhode Islanders support banning assault weapons. A majority of our state legislators and all five statewide officeholders support a ban, yet this legislation hasn't been brought up for a vote in 11 years. What are we waiting for?

At the Rhode Island Coalition Against Gun Violence, we continue to fight for an assault weapons ban along with strengthening our secure storage law. We know that most school shooters get their weapons from home and that 60% of gun deaths in the state are by suicide, which is why securely storing firearms is so important. Statistics show if a firearm is present in a home, every person in the household is three times more likely to die by suicide.

In late 2023 AG Neronha announced that a Massachusetts man had faked Rhode Island residency to purchase assault-style weapons to circumvent the Massachusetts law banning them. On December 1, 2023, East Providence was terrorized by a man with an arsenal of weapons. In February of 2022, a shooter fired hundreds of rounds of ammunition at Providence police officers using a cache of 15 weapons, including assault weapons. This public health epidemic is real and happening in Rhode Island.

The availability of these dangerous weapons has fueled an alarming increase in high-casualty mass shootings across our country, most recently in Maine. We agree with RI Senate leadership that a federal assault weapons ban needs to be reinstated. However, since the US Congress is paralyzed, we must act to protect RI residents.

Research shows states with stricter gun safety laws have lower levels of gun violence. We call on all our supporters in the legislature, in particular those who sought and accepted our endorsement for election, to prioritize these two bills this year.

Rhode Island is one of a handful of states that has not experienced a mass casualty shooting. We must ensure it never happens here. That is why we will continue to fight for public safety, and we expect our leaders to do the same.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation. We know the majority of Rhode Islanders and the majority of legislators support these life saving bills. It is time to vote these bills out of committee and send them to the floor.

Sincerely,

Melissa Carden

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*The Rhode Island Coalition Against Gun Violence (RICAGV), a coalition of organizations, activists, advocates, educators, legislators, and community members who address gun violence as an urgent public health issue. Since 2013, RICAGV has utilized the collective power of its membership and grassroots organizing methods to advance programs and policies that will reduce gun violence of all types resulting in safer, healthier Rhode Island communities.

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