

Roberta DiMezza

From: Jamie Washam <revwasham@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2024 5:16 PM
To: House Judiciary Committee
Subject: testimony on Safe Storage Act (Bill #7373) and the Assault Weapons Ban (Bill #7217)

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

Greetings esteemed members of the House Judiciary Committee ~

I write as a citizen, parent, and Minister of the First Baptist Church in America located in the heart of Providence.

How long does it take to reload? A few seconds? What can transpire in that moment, that pause?

We call for room to breathe. A pause where we can reconsider and change course.

Banning assault weapons, providing safe storage for weapons, builds in moments of pause and consideration where change can happen. Senators, Representatives, we ask you to pause and consider the difference more time can make – ban assault weapons in Rhode Island. The only purpose of these weapons is not to protect a family or to hunt for food; it is to kill as many humans as possible in a short span of time. Pause and keep weapons in secure locations. One of the words for spirit is breath (ruah), a pause, a moment to be inspired and to transform. Rhode Island stands for liberty and freedom, and we expect to have the right to exist free from the imminent threat of gun violence.

Guns make domestic violence more deadly and guns lethalize depression.

It is better to sleep on things beforehand than lie awake about them afterwards. -Baltasar Gracian, philosopher and writer (8 Jan 1601-1658)

We call for/demand/insist upon space where one is forced to reload, or lay down a weapon, space where we mutually agree to disarm.

When will we value life more than access to guns?

We can do better than this.

We accept limits on speech and freedom if it infringes upon the rights of others. **The right to bear arms does not eclipse all other rights. We have the right to gun-free places of worship, education and recreation.** Health and public safety do not come by further weaponization.

This is not about repealing the second amendment. All rights have constraints. Speaker Shekarchi! Senate President Ruggerio! Pass smart gun legislation **this year** to promote our general welfare and collective safety. Bring Rhode Island up to speed with our neighbors. We can protect people while respecting rights to liberty.

Leaders of this Statehouse! Do not hold this for further study again this year! If you believe in the premise, don't wait for the problem. Do not wait until further tragedy happens here before taking action.

My church has safety plans in place. We hold vigils to remember Columbine and Sandy Hook and Pulse Nightclub and Charlestown and Marjorie Stoneman Douglass and Tree of Life and Buffalo, NY and Uvalde, Texas. I am weary of vigils and safety drills. It is not enough.

Understand, I believe in prayer and know that transformation is possible. However, prayer does not only happen with folded hands and on bended knees. Know that this gathering is an act of prayer. Today, we resolve in the presence of God and all these witnesses, in the spirit of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, to pray with our feet in motion and our eyes wide open. Yes, offer your thoughts and prayers, and then, make the changes required to answer those prayers. Change legislation this session.

Bring this to a vote.

The prophet Isaiah urged people to use tools appropriate to the task, to move from defensiveness towards cultivating life, challenging them to “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isaiah 2:4) The prophets understood that with enough heat, transformation happens: weapons can be reshaped into garden tools, people and laws can change. Members of this august body, we are turning up the heat. It is not enough to hope and pray for change. No longer may you claim that there is nothing you can do. There is work to be done, so esteemed Representatives, get it done! We are here to work alongside you.

We are united in our commitment to safeguarding all of the people of our state. We need common sense gun safety legislation so that people in Rhode Island will not only feel safe, but be safe. God works through people, so it is time to get to work and answer some prayers. I don’t want to keep meeting my neighbors at vigils where we mourn more senseless violence and loss. Make 2024 the year when you bring it to a vote and pass the Safe Storage Act (Bill #7373) and the Assault Weapons Ban (Bill #7217) in this legislative session. Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Jamie P. Washam