



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

Testimony Re: House Bill 7217, An Act Relating to Criminal Offenses – Assault Weapons
House Judiciary Committee
March 13, 2024
Kelsey Bala, Policy Analyst

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. We would like to thank Governor McKee, Lieutenant Governor Matos, Secretary of State Amore, General Treasurer Diossa, and Attorney General Neronha for their strong support of this legislation. We would also like to thank Representative Knight for sponsoring this important bill and Representatives Caldwell, Boylan, Dawson, Speakman, Craven, Batista, Felix, McEntee, and Ajello for co-sponsoring. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for House Bill 7217, which would ban the possession, sale, and transfer of assault weapons.

Firearm related injuries remain the leading cause of death in the U.S. among children and youth ages one to 19, surpassing motor vehicle deaths. While overall deaths due to firearms increased by 8% from 2020 to 2021, deaths due to firearms specifically among children under age 18 increased by 12.7%. American children and youth are 21 to 23 times more likely to be killed by a gun than their peers in other high-income countries.

Nationally and in Rhode Island, gun reform remains a key area of focus, especially in the wake of the devastating mass shootings in schools, banks, grocery stores, parks, and the other places we walk into daily. We would like to thank the General Assembly for passing several common-sense measures to protect Rhode Islanders from senseless gun violence in 2022, and the continued work of the General Assembly to keep our children and families safe. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT believes these comprehensive state policies to reduce gun violence can be expanded to help **increase the safety of children in Rhode Island, and House Bill 7217 is a practical step to ensure safety.**

Gun-Related Emergency Department (ED) Visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths Among Children and Youth, Rhode Island, 2018-2022

AGE	# OF ED VISITS	# OF HOSPITALIZATIONS	# OF DEATHS
1 to 14	34	<5	0
15 to 17	50	<5	<5
18 to 19	63	10	7
TOTAL	147	17	11

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, 2018-2022.

In Rhode Island between 2018 and 2022, there were 147 emergency department visits, 17 hospitalizations, and 11 deaths of children and youth for gun-related injuries.

As we have seen in recent mass shootings, assault weapons allow a shooter to fire large quantities of bullets in a very short amount of time. Due to the rapid firing, assault weapons allow a shooter to injure and kill large numbers of people very quickly and often do not allow time for police to respond. Assault weapons are semiautomatic versions of weapons which were initially created for warfare purposes. Assault weapons were used in the seven deadliest mass shootings in the last decade. Ten states including California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Washington, as well as the District of Columbia, have legislated bans on the sale, manufacture, and transfer of assault weapons, which is an American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) supported measure to aid in the protection of children from firearm-related injury and violence.

We strongly urge you to join in the practical steps taken by some of our neighboring states and pass House Bill 7217 to ban the possession, sale, and transfer of assault weapons. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.