

RE: Support for Bill 7212 Assault Weapons Ban

Chair Craven and Members of the House Judiciary committee.

The time is long overdue time to ban the possession, sale, and transfer of assault weapons in the state of Rhode Island. The legislation has been introduced here for over 10 years, the great majority of Rhode Islanders favor the ban, and our neighboring states have long enacted similar bans. In this message I will not belabor the reasons for the need to ban these weapons. The arguments are well known and repeated time and time again by Law Enforcement Officers. Mayors, Governors, Religious. Educational, and other civic leaders. Indeed, watching the evening news alone presents sufficient argument. Instead, I would direct your attention to the process which seems to make it impossible here.

Assault weapon ban has been "held for further study" for at least 10 years. How much "study" does a bill require? It seems clear that the need for "further "study" is not the problem. To those who have watched and participated in this annual committee hearing the problem is elsewhere. The hearing itself has become a dispiriting charade of democratic process wasting your time and causing earnest citizens to lose faith in government. Each year despite the moving and sincere pleas for passage of an Assault Weapons Ban, it is already well known that the bill will not have a chance to be voted on by the legislature and citizens will never have the chance to hold their elected representatives accountable on this issue. We have come to understand that this mechanism of side stepping the will of the majority on some issues has to do with long standing procedural traditions related to the concentration of legislative power in a few individuals.

To date the Rhode Island Senate and House seem to have found these traditions useful in managing the enormous amount of important and positive legislative work they accomplish each year. However, in the case of the Assault Weapons Ban that tradition has served only to empower a minority, frustrate the voting public and make Rhode Island an embarrassing outlier in the protection of its people. I urge you to make this year different. Prove the reality of representative government in Rhode Island accept your moral responsibility for the safety of our fellow citizens and do at last bring about the passage of the Assault Weapons Ban.

I am pleased to note that my representative Matthew Dawson (copied on this testimony) is a co-sponsor of this important legislation.

Thank you,

Robert Westlake, MD  
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